

US EFFECTS ON ALLIED STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING DURING  
THE FIRST WORLD WAR

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
Military History

by

LUCAS A. SMITH, MAJOR, AIR NATIONAL GUARD  
B.S., Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York, 2006

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
2017

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>				<i>Form Approved</i> <i>OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
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<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 9-06-2017		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Master's Thesis		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b> AUG 2016 – JUN 2017	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b>  US Effects on Allied Strategic Decision Making during the First World War				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b>  Lucas A. Smith, Major				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				<b>8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b>				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>	
				<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> <p>The US entrance into the First World War on April 6, 1917 began the American involvement in wartime coalitions. The US played a supporting role to the Allied war effort and was far from the dominant member in the coalition. Since the Second World War the US has played an increasingly important role in forming and maintaining wartime coalitions, in large contrast to its role as an associate to the Allied powers in 1917 and 1918. The lessons presented by the US experience fighting alongside the Allies in the First World War therefore offers a unique perspective on American involvement in wartime coalitions.</p> <p>This study examines the effects of the US entrance into the First World War on the Allied strategic decision making process. Allied actions prior to April 1917 are used as a basis for later comparison to judge the impact of the US declaration of war against Germany. Specific issues such as joint strategy making, balancing national interests within the alliance, and coordination of forces in the field demonstrate the that the US presence largely continued the existing Allied strategic decision making.</p>					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> World War 1, First World War, The Great War, Strategy, American Expeditionary Forces					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>  (U)	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>  161	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b> (U)	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> (U)	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> (U)			<b>19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)</b>

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)  
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Name of Candidate: Major Lucas A. Smith

Thesis Title: US Effects on Allied Strategic Decision Making during the First World War

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Thesis Committee Chair  
Richard S. Faulkner, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_, Member  
Robert S. Martin, M.B.A.

\_\_\_\_\_, Member  
Shawn A. Budke, M.A.

Accepted this 9th day of June 2017 by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, Graduate Degree Programs  
Prisco R. Hernandez, Ph.D.

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## ABSTRACT

US EFFECTS ON ALLIED STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR, by Major Lucas A. Smith, 161 pages.

The US entrance into the First World War on April 6, 1917 began the American involvement in wartime coalitions. The US played a supporting role to the Allied war effort and was far from the dominant member in the coalition. Since the Second World War the US has played an increasingly important role in forming and maintaining wartime coalitions, in large contrast to its role as an associate to the Allied powers in 1917 and 1918. The lessons presented by the US experience fighting alongside the Allies in the First World War therefore offers a unique perspective on American involvement in wartime coalitions.

This study examines the effects of the US entrance into the First World War on the Allied strategic decision making process. Allied actions prior to April 1917 are used as a basis for later comparison to judge the impact of the US declaration of war against Germany. Specific issues such as joint strategy making, balancing national interests within the alliance, and coordination of forces in the field demonstrate that the US presence largely continued the existing Allied strategic decision making.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support, encouragement and worried onlooking from my wife, Mary, and our amazing boys Charlie, Owen, and Henry. Instead of reeling me back from the abyss, you constantly pushed me forward and enabled me to complete something that I rightfully should have done years ago. Mary, thank you for handling the hordes while I chilled in the office and listened to music. Charlie and Owen, thank you for constantly re-arranging my books so I had to continually check my sources. Henry, thank you for being a late-night baby so I could learn to type with one hand while I rocked you with the other.

This thesis is as much my product as it is of my committee. Dr. Faulkner, thank you for correcting my constant “Yoda speak” and making me a much better writer, researcher, and thinker. Sorry about wasting so many of your red pens. Mr. Martin, thank you for injecting humor into your comments, you taught me how to laugh and cry simultaneously (the crying was from Dr. Faulkner’s comments). Mr. Budke, thanks for keeping your comments light. Any errors present in this thesis are clearly because I wore my committee down and they gave up at the end.

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## ACRONYMS

AEF	American Expeditionary Force
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
SWC	Supreme War Council
USW	Unrestricted Submarine Warfare

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them.

— Winston Churchill

The First World War was the first war of coalitions in the modern age. The alliances that shaped Europe prior to 1914 not only influenced the way the war began, but also the way it was fought. The war ensnared all the great powers of Europe by 1915, and in 1917 the United States joined the conflict. Sparked by the assassination Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, the war spread rapidly due to the web of treaties and alliances of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By the late summer of 1914, it pitted two groups of coalitions, the Entente (or Allies) of Britain, France, and Russia against the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary. The US declaration of war on Germany gave the Allies new hope as they struggled against the strain of industrial warfare and the deadlock of the trenches. The entrance of the US into the First World War changed the strategic calculus for the Allies, but did it change the way the Allies coordinated, created, and balanced their wartime strategy? This thesis attempts to analyze this question.

The Entente coalition was fraught with challenges since before its creation, as the nations of Europe attempted to maneuver into positions of advantage over each other. The war magnified these challenges, and frustrated both coalitions in their efforts to create a unified strategy. Although the First World War was the first industrialized war, it was not the first to include alliances. The Napoleonic Wars are excellent examples of the

difficulties facing coalitions and large armies. As the series of coalition armies clashed against France, Napoleon's ability to divide his opponents and destroy them piecemeal was the key to many of his victories. His famous saying, "One bad general would be better than two good ones" is recognition of this challenge.<sup>1</sup> Coalitions that were unable to take advantage of their combined strength were no more powerful than their individual armies. In many cases, a smaller army with a unified command could defeat a larger, yet divided foe. This was certainly the case Napoleon faced during his rule.

Fighting a common enemy does not entail fighting for the same purpose. The Allies were frustrated by this truth throughout the First World War. While Britain, France, and Russia were united in their desire to defeat the Central Powers, each sought to attain a victory that achieved their own goals. This reality upset their plans for a unified strategy and contributed to the early success of the Central Powers. Unable to agree to a strategy that unified their actions and focused foremost on defeating the enemy, the Allies were faced with a series of defeats as the Central Powers eliminated the individual Allied armies. In 1914, it was the Belgians; in 1915 Serbia was smashed along with the combined British and French forces during the Gallipoli campaign; 1916 saw Romania enter the war and subsequently defeated; and finally, 1917 saw the near destruction of the Italian army and the ultimate prize: the collapse of Russia. The Allied inability to coordinate their actions allowed the Central Powers to focus on one isolated enemy at a time and defeat the separate and uncoordinated Allied thrusts as they fell, just as Napoleon had done a century earlier. By 1918 the strength of the Allied forces was

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 130.

concentrated in France, against a German army reinforced with divisions released from the eastern front. During the winter of 1917/1918 both sides saw the entry of the United States as the dominating factor in their strategy for the coming year. For the Allies, it meant hope for 1919, for the Germans in required victory in 1918.<sup>2</sup>

When the US declared war on Germany in 1917 it did not formally join the Allies, but entered as an associate power. The entry of the US came at a time when the Allies were facing decline. Throughout the course of 1917 the Allied armies were repeatedly checked, first with France's failed Nivelle offensive, then the British quagmire during the Third Battle of Ypres, and finally with the Italian defeat at Caporetto. The last indignity was the exit of the Russian Empire as that nation fell into a civil war. It was amongst these events that the Allies turned to the US for manpower. How the US units would fight, when and where they would come into the line, and how the Allies would manage a coordinated strategy were questions of the highest order at the end of 1917.

The purpose of this thesis to examine what effects the entrance of the US into the First World War had on Allied strategic decision making on the western front. For the purposes of this paper, "strategic decision making" is defined as the process the Allies used to coordinate, create, and balance their individual national efforts within the needs of the coalition. It also includes the command relationships used to execute this strategy, specifically on the western front.

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<sup>2</sup> For a German perspective, see Correlli Barnett, *The Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War* (London: Cassell, 2000), 278. For a French perspective, see Ferdinand Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1931), 270. For a British perspective, see David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, 1917-1918* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936), 396.

This thesis builds upon previous histories and writings on the First World War by examining specifically how US involvement impacted the way the Allies created and balanced their strategy. Many histories of the Great War analyze the US influences on the war by studying the men, battles, American Expeditionary Force (AEF) and decisions made during the final year and a half of fighting. This thesis fills in the gaps between the individual US influences and ties them together to understand how the American declaration of war in 1917 affected Allied strategic decision making.

David Trask has written two important books that address the US perspective of this thesis. The first, “The AEF and Coalition Warmaking,” analyzes the impact of General John J. Pershing’s instructions from the War Department to create an independent American field army in France and concludes that the delay in creating an independent AEF caused additional Allied casualties and degraded American and Allied relationships. Another of his works, “The United States in the Supreme War Council,” he describes the actions of the Americans who served on the penultimate Allied decision making body of the war. Trask argues that the Americans were able to balance their support to the Allied war effort with their own policy and strategy desires, ultimately providing the victory, armistice, but not the peace that President Woodrow Wilson sought with his declaration of war on Germany in April 1917.<sup>3</sup> This thesis looks to build upon these arguments by analyzing how the pursuit of American strategy impacted Allied strategic decision making.

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<sup>3</sup> David F. Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council: American War Aims and Inter-Allied Strategy, 1917-1918* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 175.

Many of the leading figures from the First World War were prolific writers, providing a window into the thoughts and actions of the time in question. In particular, the memoirs published after the war by David Lloyd George (British prime minister from 1916-1922), Marshall Ferdinand Foch (Commander-in-Chief of Allied Armies in 1918), and General Pershing (Commander, AEF) are particularly enlightening. Each explains and justifies their actions during the war in line with their national perspectives. For example, Lloyd George defends his quest for a decisive offensive outside the western front on the grounds that the rot within Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire offered a cheaper path to victory. Similarly, Foch's memoirs, although published after his death and partially incomplete, paint the picture of a man fighting the Germans as best he could despite conflicts with his British and American counterparts. Finally, Pershing's memoirs defend his actions in resisting the amalgamation of US forces into the Allied armies, and argues that US policy and strategy were the keys to the successes of November 1918.

Additional original works studied in pursuit of this thesis include Charles Seymour's, "The Intimate Papers of Colonel House," which provides an in-depth examination of American diplomacy and policy both prior to and during the war. Where necessary, the writings of German general's Erich von Falkenhayn and Erich Ludendorff are used to give an enemy's perspective on the actions of the Allies and Americans.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the correspondence and speeches of President Wilson provide a window into his

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<sup>4</sup> Falkenhayn was Chief of the German General Staff from September 1914 through August 1916. Ludendorff served as Quartermaster General (a novel way of saying Chief of Staff) to General Paul von Hindenburg (Chief of the German General Staff) from August 1916 through November 1918.

design for the war, which is important when attempting to understand the overarching policy goals and political end state envisioned.

In order to corroborate the post-war testimonies of the individuals involved during the First World War, original documentation is referenced. The United States Army Center of Military History has compiled thousands of original documents into its 17-volume work, "United States Army in The World War 1917-1919." The first three volumes of this work, "Organization of the American Expeditionary Forces," "Policy-forming Documents of the American Expeditionary Forces," and "Training and Use of American Units with the British and French" include vital correspondence and documentation to support or refute claims made in many of the post-war memoirs. Beyond serving as an important check against other sources, these documents provide valuable insight into the creation, organization, and training of the American forces and the interplay between the Allies and Americans throughout 1917 and 1918.

The Supreme War Council (SWC) was created in late 1917 as a political-military body to unify the actions of the Allies and Americans. In order to better understand this body, original documentation in the form of meeting minutes, resolutions, and correspondence has been used to better understand the American influence on Allied strategic decision making. The "Records of the American Section of the Supreme War Council, 1917-1919" are available through the National Archives Microfilm Publications, and were used heavily in the development of this thesis.

This thesis fits within the existing works by analyzing how the individual areas of American-Allied interactions combined to influence the Allied strategy making. The thesis's scope is limited to American influence on Allied strategic decision making from

April 1917 to November 1918 for land forces on the western front. Although some subordinate theaters are discussed, the primary stage is the war in France. Events leading up to the US declaration of war are analyzed to determine a baseline for Allied strategy and for comparison of later decisions. Naval activities related to the US entry into the war and the subsequent establishment and sustainment of the AEF are evaluated but otherwise the focus shall be the land forces of the Allies and the US. There was a close connection between wartime policy and strategy and where necessary politics will be discussed but the focus shall be the military strategies of the Allies and Americans. As such, there will be no discussion on the post-armistice Allied strategy or the peace talks held in Paris during 1919.

The main research question to be studied in this thesis is, how did the American entry into World War One effect the Allies' strategy making for their land forces in France up to the armistice of November of 1918? Subordinate questions include: how was the US wartime policy and strategy incorporated into Allied land strategy on the Western Front; how did the American entry influence the strategic coordination and decision making between the Allied armies leading up to the campaigns of 1918; and how did the employment of the AEF as an independent force effect Allied strategic decisions?

This thesis answers these questions by first examining Allied strategic decision making prior to the US entry, focusing on three areas of Allied strategic decision making: coordination of strategy, balancing national priorities, and command relationships. Chapter 2 covers these topics by analyzing Allied actions from 1914 through the end of 1917. Chapter 3 then addresses the US perspective towards the war by studying how US

policy prior to April 1917 later affected US wartime policy and strategy. Chapters 2 and 3 create a baseline for comparing later Allied strategic decision making after the US entry. Chapter 4 analyzes Allied strategic decision making from the arrival of US forces in June 1917 through March 1918 and investigates the effects of US policy and strategy on it during this time, examining the way Allied strategy was coordinated, national priorities were balanced, and multinational command relationships were executed. Chapter 5 analyzes the US impacts on Allied strategy from March through November of 1918, when American forces became involved in the final months of conflict on the western front. Finally, chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a summary of results and their significance.

It is nearly unthinkable that the US would engage in unilateral action during the current age of multinational operations. As such, it is important to study previous multinational operations, of which the First World War was arguably the first conflict where the US played a key role. During the conflicts of the previous two and a half decades, the US has played a leading role in conflicts throughout the world. During the Great War the US's role was reversed, supported the existing coalition of Britain and France. It is important to study the interaction between the US and its European partners in 1917 and 1918 as it represents a future possibility given the increasingly multi-polar world. This thesis adds to the knowledge of multinational operations by studying the strategic decision making impacts of the US's first foray into the realm of coalition warfare.

## CHAPTER 2

### ALLIED STRATEGY: 1914 - 1917

We had to remove the fundamental cause of the failures of 1915, 1916, and 1917. What was it? The blind and stupid refusal to accept the principle of the single front. Theoretically and rhetorically the united front was boomed, in practice it was ignored. Each G.H.Q. concentrated on its own front. They gave no conscientious or co-ordinated thought to other flanks which were equally important and at a given moment might be more vital to the fortunes of the Alliance. When from another side of the immense battlefield, our Allies sent a cry of despair, then a little assistance was scraped together—always belated. The full platters were for the trenches where they were commanding; for the real need there were only scraps. Russia, France, Britain and Serbia were just Allies, they were not comrades fighting the same battle for a common cause.<sup>5</sup>

—David Lloyd George

Allied strategic decision making evolved over the course of the war. Influenced by the Allied successes and failures during the first three years of the war, by the time the US entered the conflict the Allies had largely established a procedure for making strategy. By 1917 the Allies were using the winter months to coordinate their various national strategies into a unified strategy. Throughout this process, they compromised on minor issues for the sake of the coalition, often taking into account their national interests and abilities. Ostensibly giving way to Allied pressures on controversial issues, the British, French, Russians, and later Italians usually attempted to influence the coalition to support their scheme. Finally, given the political situations within Britain and France, neither was willing to hand control of their forces over to a foreign commander. This perpetuated a parallel command structure on the western front throughout this time.

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<sup>5</sup> David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George* 4 vols. (London: Ivor, Nicholson, and Watson, 1934), 4:2340-2341.

This chapter examines these three facets of Allied strategic decision making and analyzes how the Allies developed the system that was in place in April 1917 when the US declared war on Germany. This is not meant to be an in-depth overview of every aspect of the war prior to 1918, instead only specific events will be examined to demonstrate how these challenges were met and how they effected Allied strategic decision making. The analysis that follows demonstrates a discernable pattern of how the Allies approached the war and allows for further comparison after the US entry.

### Creating a Unified Allied Strategy

The First World War was destined to be a war of coalitions. The intricate nature of alliances and treaties between the nations of Europe in 1914 meant that any war between two great powers was likely draw in the rest. The nature of these agreements shaped the Allies strategy for the first year and a half of the First World War. Half hazard and uncoordinated, the lack of a unified strategy during 1914 and 1915 birthed the initial efforts to improve coordination between the Allied nations. Held in late 1915, the first Inter-Allied Conference at Chantilly was the first effort of the Allied nations to coordinate a unified effort for the following year. Buoyed by their apparent success in 1916 by withstanding the combined pressures of the Central Powers, the Allies met again at Chantilly to plan their campaigns for 1917. Faced with logistical and geographical hurdles, both Chantilly conferences set a pattern of joint action on the western front supported by closely timed operations in Italy, Russia, and elsewhere. If the Central Powers launched a major offensive on the eastern or western front, the Allies agreed to undertake a counter-offensive on the other front in order to draw off enemy forces.

The Allied strategy for 1914 was based upon the individual national strategies of France, Russia, and Britain. Their actions in 1914 provided the foundation for later Allied strategies and began the pattern of a joint effort on the western front timed with Russian action on the eastern front. Envisioning a quick, decisive war, there was little thought given to the actions after the initial blows each planned to land on the Central Powers. This assumption left the Allies empty handed when 1914 ended in stalemate and all faced the prospect of a long war.

France's strategic planning was largely directed against Germany. Although Italy was nominally a member of the Triple Alliance, improving relations between France and Italy since 1902 had largely nullified the threat to France's southern flank.<sup>6</sup> France created Plan XVII to recapture Alsace and Lorraine, territories that Germany conquered in the 1870-1871 Franco-Prussian War. Revised in 1913, the French strengthened their left wing against Belgium and Luxemburg in response to intelligence that Germany expected to attack through those countries.<sup>7</sup> Plan XVII required a quick offensive into Germany to catch the Germans early in their mobilization and demonstrate good faith to the Russians.<sup>8</sup> Maintaining their alliance with Russia was vital to France, as without it Germany could mass in the west in numbers that France could not hope to match.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace: The Road to 1914* (New York, NY: Random House, 2014), 370.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>8</sup> H. P. Willmott, *World War I* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2003), 29.

<sup>9</sup> MacMillan, 369.

The Russians created Plan 19A in response to the dual threat posed by Germany and Austria-Hungary. Finalized in 1912, the plan's decisive effort fell against Austria and included a supporting offensive into German East Prussia.<sup>10</sup> The Russian priority was Hungarian territory in Galicia, whereas the invasion of Germany was a requirement of their alliance with France. The Russians also rightly concluded that they would fare better in combat versus the Austro-Hungarian forces than those of Germany, making it logical for them to focus on the weaker of the two foes.<sup>11</sup>

The concept of the German Schlieffen Plan was generally understood by the Triple Entente. Through spies and military attachés both France and Russia were aware of the scheme of the German plan.<sup>12</sup> The German movement through neutral Belgium, protected by treaty since 1839, was not intended to provoke a British response but was likely to elicit one.<sup>13</sup> Through staff talks as early as 1906, the French and British coordinated plans for a British Expeditionary Force (BEF) of six infantry divisions and one cavalry division for action on the continent in the event of war.<sup>14</sup>

The Allied staffs coordinated their national plans with each other over the course of years. Each focused on what it would do in the event of war, and shared its plans as

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<sup>10</sup> Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 55.

<sup>11</sup> MacMillan, 367-368.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 360, 373.

<sup>13</sup> Robert B. Asprey, *The German High Command at War: Hindenburg and Ludendorff Conduct World War I* (New York, NY: W. Morrow, 1991), 44.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 44.

necessary with its partners. Discussions focused mostly on the mobilization schedules, the forces involved, and reassurance that they would aid each other. Beyond these areas there was little planning for the coalition's war. Methods were not in place to coordinate joint strategy after the war began. Indeed, based on many of their pre-war assumptions, this was irrelevant. Most nations believed that the war would be short and the initial blows would largely settle it. Setting up methods for further coordination was not necessary if this assumption proved correct.

Given the realities of the war by the end of 1914, this was a serious oversight. The French invasion of Alsace-Lorraine failed, as did the Russian invasion of East Prussia. The BEF was sent to the continent, but was pushed back repeatedly after landing in northern France.<sup>15</sup> The only Allied successes in 1914 were the Franco-British halt of the German armies at the Marne and the Russian invasion of Galicia. Of these only the Russian invasion of Galicia was planned prior to 1914. All of the Allies were exhausted after the initial stages of the war and faced a continuing conflict none had planned for. When 1915 dawned, there were few mechanisms for the Allies to coordinate their actions and this had consequences for their campaigns.

Despite the failures of 1914, there was little impetus in 1915 to create a joint Allied strategy. This decision made the Allies reactive to the actions of the Central Powers for most of 1915. Although Britain, France, and Russia attempted to coordinate their actions to support each other, there was no centralized planning mechanism to enable it. Throughout 1915 British and French cooperation on the western front grew,

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<sup>15</sup> Willmott, 43.

evolving from separate attacks early in the year to jointly-timed offensives in the spring and fall. The powers in the west also attempted to relieve pressure on their Allies in the east by launching large offensives to draw forces away from their beleaguered partners. Other than these efforts, the Allied strategy was reactive to the will of the Central Powers and failed to synchronize their actions during 1915.

The French continued to attack the German positions in the west throughout the winter of 1914/1915. Relatively inactive during this time due to a lack of manpower and materiel, the BEF did not launch any major attacks until March when they attacked at Neuve Chapelle. The lack of success from their separate attempts drove the French and British to work closer together. In late March, they met at the French headquarters at Chantilly to discuss plans for a combined offensive against the Germans in May.<sup>16</sup> This was the first step towards Allied coordination on a larger scale. Although it initially only included the British and French, their meeting at Chantilly planted the seeds for more inclusive conferences that followed. Unfortunately, the Allied plans for May were pre-empted by a German attack at Ypres in April. When the Allies finally attacked the next month, they were met with the tactical stalemate of the trenches that neither could break. The Allied strategy was beginning to improve but was hampered by the tactical stalemate imposed by the trenches (see figure 1).

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 134-135.

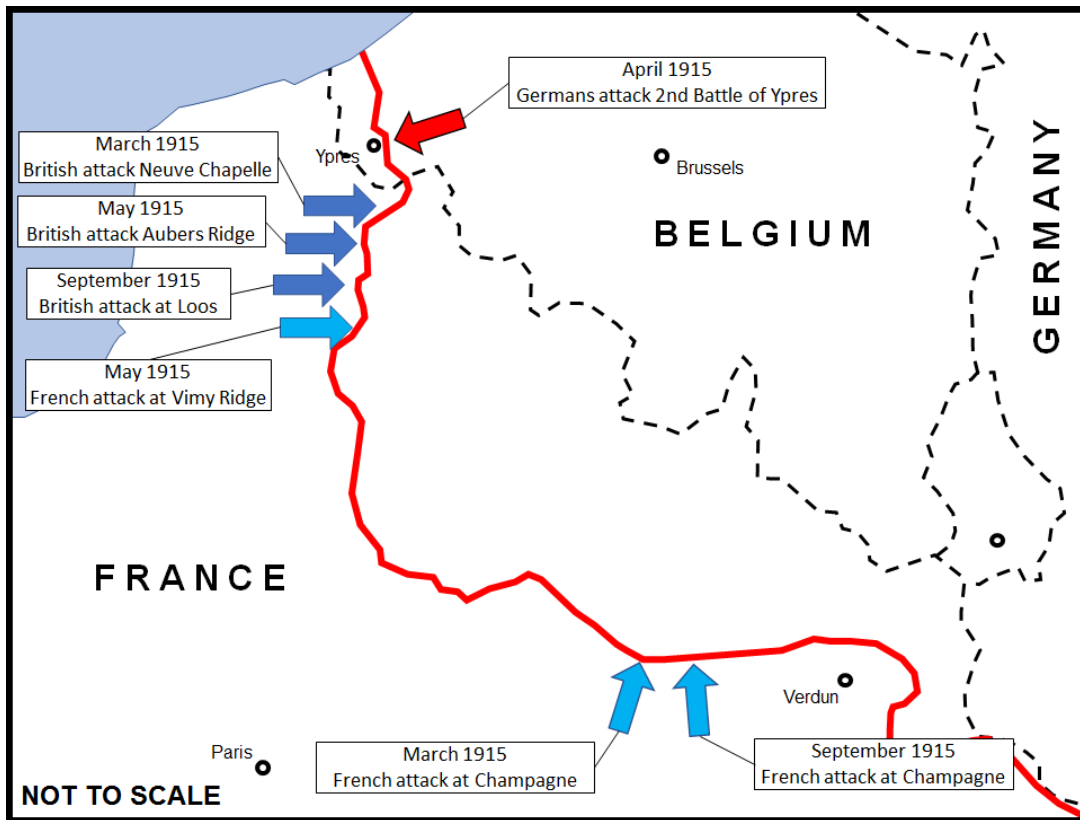


Figure 1. The Western Front:1915

*Source:* Created by author.

Allied efforts to relieve pressure on their eastern partners was similarly ad hoc due to the lack of a coordinating body and pre-arranged counteroffensives. Their first attempt to support the Russians came in the early spring when the British and French launched the Gallipoli campaign against the Ottoman Dardanelles. A similar offensive was launched in September to relieve the Russians from the Central Power's Gorlice-Tarnow Offensive. The simultaneous attacks in Artois and Champagne followed the Allied pattern of their spring 1916 attacks. The British and French timed their offensives to coincide and force the Germans to reinforce the western front, thereby drawing forces

from the east and away from Russia. Tactical limitations reduced their effectiveness and correspondingly limited their strategic value in obtaining this result (see figure 1.).

The Allies also organized a joint British-French expedition to support Serbia. Launched in October, it landed at Salonika, Macedonia on the eve of the Central Power's assault on the Allies' Balkan partner.<sup>17</sup> Again, the Allied strategy was reactive to the actions of the enemy. The expedition ultimately proved successful, but not until the end of 1918.<sup>18</sup> Until then it proved a controversial mechanism of Allied strategy that cost resources and manpower during the intervening years.

By the end of 1915 the Allies recognized they needed to do more to coordinate their actions if they wished to succeed. They spent much of 1915 reactive to the actions of their enemies. Even though the Allies attempted joint offensives at Gallipoli, in France, and Salonika, none had succeeded. One of the few Allied strategic successes of 1915 was enticing Italy to join their side, but this provided an additional partner to incorporate into their strategic plans. The Central Powers were more successful in 1915, maintaining their defense in the west, pushing the Russians out of Poland, and knocking Serbia from the war. As 1915 came to a close the Allies chose to meet for the first time to create a unified strategy that would dominate the Central Powers.

1916 was the first year the Allies created a unified strategy to guide their actions. The failures of 1915 were the direct result of the scattered nature of the Allied offensives, which they hoped to avoid in 1916. Marshall Joseph Joffre, who led the effort to gather

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<sup>17</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History* (New York, NY: H. Holt, 1994), 204.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 466.

the Allies together for a coordinated meeting to discuss strategy for 1916, remarked in his memoirs:

While the sacrifices we had made and the incontestable numerical superiority we enjoyed had brought us only insignificant results, it was evident that the principal reason for this state of affairs lay in the disconnected fashion in which the Allies had conducted the war—each upon his own front and each according to his own ideas.<sup>19</sup>

Joffre's plans for an Inter-Allied Conference began in November 1915 and came to fruit when the nations of Britain, Russia, Italy, Belgium, and Serbia met together for the first time at the French headquarters at Chantilly on December 6th.<sup>20</sup> The priority for the Allies was, "the destruction of the German and Austrian armies."<sup>21</sup> Recognizing that the war had become one of attrition, their strategy for 1916 was a coordinated effort to attrit the forces of the Central Powers while gathering the equipment and materiel necessary for victory.<sup>22</sup> Follow-on meetings determined details such as the timing of the various national offensives. The Russians were to launch an attack in mid-June, followed by a British and French joint offensive on the Somme in August. The Italians also planned to attack on the Isonzo in August.

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Jacques Césaire Joffre, *The Personal Memoirs of Joffre, Field Marshal of the French Army* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1932), 410.

<sup>20</sup> William J. Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme: The First Battle of the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2011), 56.

<sup>21</sup> French Memorandum to the 2nd Inter-Allied Conference at Chantilly, December 6, 1915, FirstWorldWar.com, accessed January 17 2017, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/chantillymemo.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

The state of the Russian and British armies along with the weather in the disparate fronts of France, Italy, and Russia required that the Allied offensives start in mid-1916. This delay meant that the Allied plans for 1916 were pre-empted when the Germans attacked Verdun in February. The German offensive placed immense pressure on the French and forced them to call for Allied relief. Russian attacks against Vilna in March, designed to aid the French, did little to stop the German offensive at Verdun.<sup>23</sup> Further pressure came in May when Austria attacked Italy on the Trentino, forcing the Italians to ask for Allied help.<sup>24</sup> The Russian Brusilov Offensive in June and the joint British-French attack on the Somme in July ultimately put an end to the attritional battle at Verdun.<sup>25</sup> Although the Allies had the battles they planned at Chantilly, their timing and effectiveness was dulled by becoming reactions to the actions of the Central Powers.

The beginnings of a cohesive Allied strategy began in 1916. Although the plans for that year were ultimately forestalled by the actions of the Central Powers, they were the first efforts of the Allies to work together on all fronts. The perceived successes of the first Inter-Allied Conference at Chantilly ensured this mechanism continued for the campaigns of 1917.<sup>26</sup>

When Joffre began planning for 1917, he looked to the successful methods he used the year prior. He believed that the planning at Chantilly in 1915 had led to the

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<sup>23</sup> Willmott, 146.

<sup>24</sup> Asprey, 234.

<sup>25</sup> Erich von Falkenhayn, *The German General Staff and its Decisions, 1914-1916* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1920), 304-306.

<sup>26</sup> Joffre, 500-501.

“victories” of the Russians, Italians, and Franco-British attacks in 1916.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, he repeated his past success with another round of strategic planning at Chantilly in November 1916. Other than the starting date for the various Allied offensives, little changed from their previous year’s plan. Aware that the German attack at Verdun had preempted their plans in 1916, the Chantilly Conference members agreed to start their offensives as early as possible in 1917.<sup>28</sup>

After Joffre’s resignation in December, the British and French attack was placed under the direction of the new French commander, Robert Nivelle. Nivelle promised swift victory using the techniques he had used to defeat the Germans at Verdun the previous October.<sup>29</sup> Despite Nivelle’s optimism, his offensive failed spectacularly, leading to the mutiny of the French army and his replacement by Petain in May 1917.<sup>30</sup> The other Allied attempts were similarly frustrated, with none of them finding success. The Russian Kerensky Offensive was defeated swiftly and turned into a rout on the eastern front. The Eleventh Battle of the Isonzo met with somewhat more success for the Italians than the previous ten, but their gains were eliminated in November with their crushing defeat at Caporetto.<sup>31</sup> British attempts at Flanders in the fall and winter of 1917

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 500.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 508, 512.

<sup>29</sup> Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis, Volume III, 1916-1918* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 3:190.

<sup>30</sup> Correlli Barnett, *The Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War* (London: Cassell, 2000), 193-194.

<sup>31</sup> Willmott, 234-235.

failed when General Douglas Haig, now commander of the BEF, sought unsuccessfully to batter his way through the German lines.

As much as the Allies had succeeded in coordinating their plans, they again failed to appreciate those of the Central Powers. Although they were successful in attacking before Germany or her allies, they failed to appreciate that the Central Powers had chosen to go on the strategic defensive for the beginning of 1917.<sup>32</sup> The German withdrawal to the Hindenburg line in February, the bad weather in Italy, and the beginnings of the Russian Revolution meant that the Allied attacks didn't happen simultaneously. Instead, the Franco-British Nivelle Offensive began in April, the Italians attacked in May, and the Russians in July. The unified strategy that Joffre sought to create was executed, but carried forth without synchronization and ultimately failed.

Instead of providing the victory the Allies needed, they wasted resources on a poorly executed plan. The failure of the Nivelle offensive, which was touted as a quick, decisive way for victory, caused the French armies to mutiny in May. The Kerensky Offensive was quickly countered by an Austro-German offensive that turned the tables in the east and caused the downfall of the Russian Provisional Government. When Haig turned his attention towards Flanders in the fall, he wasted the strength of the BEF in the mud of Passchendaele. The final Allied calamity was the Italian defeat at Caporetto. The combined Austro-German attack began on October 24th and by November 12th the Italian armies were 70 miles from the former Isonzo battlefields.<sup>33</sup> The Italians managed

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<sup>32</sup> Asprey, 273-274.

<sup>33</sup> Asprey, 347.

to piece together a defensive line along the Piave River as a last defense and were forced to call for Allies for reinforcements.<sup>34</sup> By the end of 1917 none of the Allies powers were in any condition to pursue an offensive for the near future, with ramifications for their American partners in 1918.

During the first three years of conflict in the First World War the Allies made successive attempts at improving their strategic coordination. Ultimately settling on a series of winter conferences, their strategy was little more than agreements to time their individual efforts. The Allies consistently failed to understand the strategy of the Central Powers, and were unable to create a suitable plan to combat them prior to 1918. Although the Chantilly conferences were a successful mechanism for bringing the Allies together, they failed to generate a strategy capable of defeating the Germany and her partners. To succeed, the Allies needed to implement additional changes to the way they coordinated and created strategy.

### Balancing National Priorities

A coalition aligned against a common foe does not always fight for the same reasons. The Allies were ostensibly united in their goal of defeating the Central Powers but each retained their unique national ambitions. At times these ambitions appeared to get in the way of the enemy's defeat. General Pershing observed as much in his memoirs, stating:

History is replete with the failures of coalitions and seems to be repeating itself in the World War. . . . The lack of unity in military operations conducted

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<sup>34</sup> Five British and Six French divisions were sent to Italy to aid the Italians. James G. Harbord, *The American Army in France, 1917-1918* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936), 175.

jointly by allied armies often results from divergence of war aims. In pursuit of these aims, governments may seek to place part of their forces in a position that would be advantageous after the war is over and lose sight of the fact that complete victory can only be achieved by beating the enemy's army.<sup>35</sup>

It is true that the British, French, and Russians never lost sight of their objectives, and persistently attempted to convince, coerce, and entice their partners into their way of thinking. Without a dominant partner, they were forced to balance their individual desires with the needs of the coalition and managed to find common ground for a unified course of action. Through the analysis of the pre-war agendas of the Allied great powers and subsequent campaigns through 1917, it will be demonstrated that they were able to balance their national priorities in favor of a unified strategy.

The beginnings of the Entente started with the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894, created in response to the threat from the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria, and Italy.<sup>36</sup> Although France and Russia had little in common strategically, they both needed the other to balance the threat posed from the central European nations. Both nations also desired territory and influence held by the Triple Alliance. France was focused on retrieving Alsace-Lorraine from Germany, whereas Russia eyed territory versus Austria-Hungary and an increased influence in the Balkans. Russian aspirations in the Bosphorus and Caucuses at the expense of the Ottoman Empire also shaped strategy both prior to and after the Ottoman entry as a Central Power. Ultimately both Russia and France attempted to use the other as means to achieve their ends.

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<sup>35</sup> John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* (New York, NY: Frederick S. Stokes Company, 1931), 1:34.

<sup>36</sup> MacMillan, 81.

The complex interplay of nationalism and cultures in the east complicated the strategic situation for Russia. Although interested in obtaining Galicia from Austria-Hungary, their primary objective was benefiting from the apparent weakness of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans had closed the Bosphorus during the Balkan Wars in the years prior to 1914, drastically impacting shipping to the Russian Black Sea ports.<sup>37</sup> Russia eyed capturing not only the Dardanelles and Gallipoli, but also Constantinople itself along with territory in the Caucasus.<sup>38</sup> A warm-water port and access to the Mediterranean offered enormous economic dividends for Imperial Russia had these objectives been achieved.

Russia also faced challenges along its western borders with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Aware that Russian Poland was difficult to defend, the Russian military preferred to abandon the territory and use it to attrit the expected Austro-German attacks, trading space for time.<sup>39</sup> For practical reasons, Russia desired Austrian Galicia as a way to remove that threat to Russian Poland.<sup>40</sup> The Russians were also wary of the Germany military, respecting its abilities more than the forces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Attacking into Galicia was therefore less risky than an attack north against a capable German foe.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> McMeekin, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>41</sup> MacMillan, 367.

Even though the French and Russians were aligned against the same enemies, their goals in a military conflict were divergent. Faced with a massive population imbalance, France needed Russian manpower to offset the German menace.<sup>42</sup> It was therefore imperative that France obtain Russian assistance against Germany as soon as possible during any conflict; without Russia, France's survival was at stake.<sup>43</sup> France leveraged its financial strength prior to the conflict to invest heavily in railroads throughout western Russia. On the surface this benefitted both parties by increasing the mobility of the Russian military and allowing them to attack East Prussia as well as defend Poland. However, this plan was not a priority for Russia, and indeed at one point they refused to build any connections west of the Niemen River (see figure 2).<sup>44</sup> Political pressure and French funding ensured railway construction continued, but it did not change the Russian priorities in the event of a war.

The French and the Russians struggled against these competing priorities. Ultimately, they created a balance in their prewar planning, but it tilted in favor of the Russians. The Russians planned to attack Germany and Austria-Hungary, therefore meeting their requirements to support the French with an attack on Germany, while also serving their own interests to the south. When the Russians briefed the French on Plan 19A, they implied the armies tasked to invade Germany were larger than they actually

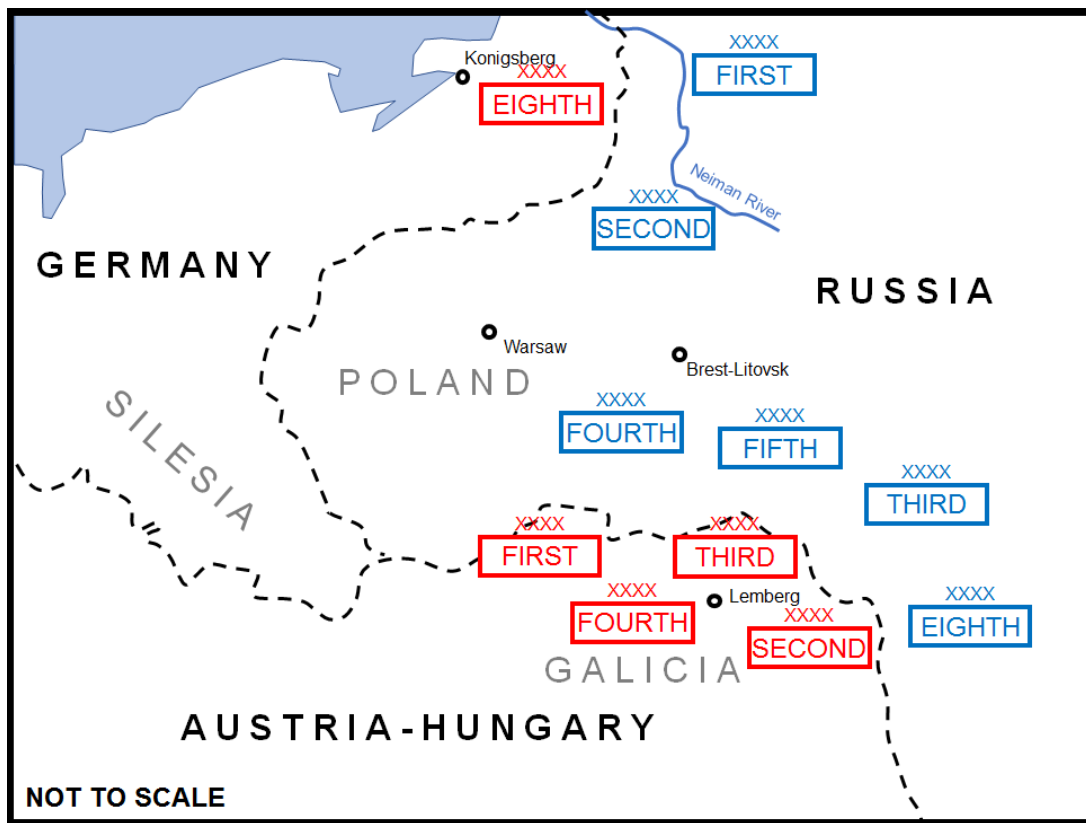
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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>43</sup> Joffre, 20.

<sup>44</sup> McMeekin, 21.

were, misleading the French to their actual dispositions.<sup>45</sup> As much as the French wanted a major Russian attack against Berlin, it wouldn't come. When Russia began its offensive against the Central Powers in 1914, two-thirds of their forces attacked into Galicia while only one-third went north into East Prussia (see figure 2).<sup>46</sup> Russia could choose where to fight, all the while receiving aid from her allies. France had no choice but to support Russia. France and later Britain were too worried about the German army to risk losing their ally in the east.<sup>47</sup>



<sup>45</sup> MacMillan, 369

<sup>46</sup> McMeekin, 80.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

## Figure 2. The Polish Salient

*Source:* Created by author.

Britain's relationship with France and Russia prior to the war was similar to that between Russia and France. The Entente Cordiale of 1904 and the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 largely mitigated the previous colonial concerns between these powers.<sup>48</sup> Rapprochement with Russia and France provided a counterbalance to the growing German economic ascendancy and naval building program which threatened Britain's dominance. Attempts by the Germans to fracture the nascent Anglo-French relationship during the Moroccan Crisis of 1905 ended in failure when Britain supported the French.<sup>49</sup> The growing cooperation within the Triple Entente might have improved relations between Britain and its newfound partners, but it did not bind the British Empire to aid them militarily.

The British were committed to maintaining Belgian neutrality but was not required to aid France or Russia in a fight against the Central Powers.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the only way Britain was likely to join the war on behalf of the Entente was if Germany invaded Belgium. A likelihood given the German war plans, it was nonetheless an unknown for the French and Russian military planners. Pre-war planning finalized the British commitment to France at roughly 125,000 men. Not a significant force for the

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<sup>48</sup> MacMillan, 168-169, 210-211.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 390.

<sup>50</sup> Asprey, 44.

Germans to overcome, but enough to help the French blunt a German drive through Belgium and northern France.<sup>51</sup> The true British benefit would be economic, as the Royal Navy planned to blockade Germany, cutting off vital economic resources. Britain also offered the hope of material and financial aid; items vital to both France and Russia.

If war came, Britain stood to gain the support of large continental armies to support its efforts against Germany. Its allies would gain the crucial support at sea which provided both military and economic assistance. Again, as is the case with France and Russia, France got the lesser end of the agreement. The British were under no terms to come to France's aid directly. There was also only a token force available to help the French on the land. If it so chose, Britain could have left its troops at home and relied on its navy or stayed out altogether.

Overall the strategy created by the Allies prior to 1914 balanced their overall desires, but with Russia and Britain with more leverage over France. Each was committed to the alliance insofar as it provided them what they desired. Each was willing to give a little to maintain the support of the others, even if in the case such as France, it might have gotten less than it wanted. As the war stretched into 1915, the Allies were forced to re-evaluate their priorities in the face of a larger commitment in the fight against the Central Powers.

The first effort of 1915 that required the Allies to balance their national interests was the Gallipoli campaign. The Ottomans invaded the Caucasus in January 1915, and

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<sup>51</sup> MacMillan, 375.

Gallipoli was the British and French response to relieve pressure on their Russian Ally.<sup>52</sup> The Gallipoli peninsula juts south-east on the European side of the Bosphorus and commands the Dardanelles strait that connects the Black and Mediterranean Seas. Allied control of the peninsula would have opened the way to Constantinople, Ottoman defeat, and a sea-line of communication to Russia.<sup>53</sup>

The British and French supported the operation beyond these inherent strategic benefits. To the British it offered expanded territory in the middle east to go along with its possessions in Persia and Egypt. France too had eyed Ottoman territory, and offered its support in exchange for what would become Syria.<sup>54</sup> The Russians supported the campaign on one condition: they wanted Constantinople. Willing to acquiesce to British and French demands for territory elsewhere, this was the prerequisite for Russian support.<sup>55</sup> Although the plans to divide the spoils were made relatively easily and the various desires of each Ally were met, constant challenges frustrated the actual conquest. Tactical blunders left the landing areas unsupportable in the face of the Ottoman resistance, weather, and disease. The British and French jointly decided to abandon the campaign at the end of 1915.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Peter Hart, *Gallipoli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14.

<sup>53</sup> Gilbert, 134-135.

<sup>54</sup> Hart, 20.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 413.

After Gallipoli, the next Allied balancing act of 1915 involved bringing Italy into the war on their side. The Italians had been a member of the Triple Alliance since 1882 were technically allied to Germany and Austria-Hungary when the war broke out.<sup>57</sup> Italy stayed on the sidelines in July 1914, instead waiting to join whichever side seemed likeliest to win and which could offer the most territory.<sup>58</sup> Enticed by swaths of Austrian territory along the Adriatic Sea, Italy joined the Allies in April with the signing of the Treaty of London.<sup>59</sup> The Italian entry had consequences for Allied strategy and its further creation. On the one hand, it offered additional pressure against Austria-Hungary, who at the time was weakening and needed increased German support. The Italian army was fresh and drew forces from elsewhere in the Central Powers to contain them. Unfortunately for the Allies, the Italians needed substantial aid, especially later in the war in the form of coal and food.<sup>60</sup> Although not envisioned at this point in the war, Italy also called for Allied reinforcements when attacked at the Trentino in 1916 and again after Caporetto in 1917.<sup>61</sup> Overall, the Italian entry into the Allied camp served the strategic needs of all its partners. Although it cost the Allies additional resources, and after November 1917 French and British divisions, this was worthwhile. The Italians tied

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<sup>57</sup> Asprey, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Gilbert, 34.

<sup>59</sup> Willmott, 73.

<sup>60</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Fourth Session of the Supreme War Council, held at 10, Downing Street, London, March 14-15, 1918, 17-18; Records of the American Section of the Supreme War Council, 1917-1919, National Archives Microfilm Publication M923, roll 21.

<sup>61</sup> Asprey, 234; Willmott, 276.

down Austrian forces which required further commitments from Germany. In an attritional war that would be won by the last million men, Italy provided a much-needed source of manpower for the Allied cause in 1915.

The final major balancing act of 1915 was the Allied expedition to Salonika, undertaken as a venture to aid Serbia. The Macedonian front illustrates how the Allies could balance their ambitions in the face of coalition necessity. Established in October 1915, the British and French soldiers landed too late to save Serbia from a combined Austro-German and Bulgarian invasion.<sup>62</sup> After its initial failure, both the British and French had reservations about maintaining their presence. At a conference held at Calais in December, both nations proposed that due to the Serbian defeat, the force had no more purpose.<sup>63</sup> Combined pressure from Russia, Italy and Serbia overcame French opposition to the expedition. The British attitude changed when the King of Greece promised that his armies would not attack the Allied forces.<sup>64</sup> The Salonika expedition therefore represents the case that the Allies were able to come to an agreement in the face of national differences. As 1915 drew to a close, the Allies met at Chantilly for the first time and used the forum as a method to overcome their differences and create a unified strategy for the coming year.

The Allies strategy for 1916 agreed to at Chantilly minimized the amount of give and take necessary. For the most part, each nation focused on their individual theaters of

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<sup>62</sup> Willmott, 121.

<sup>63</sup> Gilbert, 216.

<sup>64</sup> Joffre, 425.

operations and any haggling amounted to the timing of their various offensives. The Allied strategy of 1916 was created around the various desires of each party, allowing each to focus on their individual fronts. Unity was achieved by timing their offensives to land one after the other. This made it easier for them to agree to the strategy proposed by Joffre at Chantilly and avoided any of the difficult discussions that had affected them over the previous year.

Although the strategy proposed for 1917 greatly resembled the strategy for 1916, the Allies faced greater difficulty in agreeing to some of its particulars. The disagreements largely boiled down to arguments over two theaters: France and Salonika. On the western front, both Britain and France had agreed to joint attacks against the Germans like those executed in 1916. In Macedonia, some Allies sought to increase the size of the expedition to enable an attack against Bulgaria. The Allies ultimately found a way to reach accord on these actions using techniques they had used prior; namely, they pursued their individual goals but only as far as they did not jeopardize the alliance.

Disagreements over the campaign on the western front originated between British and French priorities. When planning for the campaigns of 1917, Britain preferred to focus in Flanders where they could threaten Germany's control of Belgian ports and U-boat bases. The Germans had used submarines to attack Allied shipping since the beginning of the war and began a concentrated effort against Allied shipping in 1915 but stopped after a shortage of U-boats limited its effectiveness and diplomatic protests from the US threatened war. The Allies were aware of increased German U-boat construction in 1916, and feared another German submarine campaign. When planning for the campaigns of 1917, Britain preferred to focus in Flanders where they could threaten

Germany's control of Belgian ports and U-boat bases. Joffre, on the other hand, sought a renewed campaign on the Somme. These priorities were ultimately balanced by the British taking a supporting role for the renewed Somme offensive (what became the Nivelle Offensive) while continuing to plan for an attack in Flanders later in the year.<sup>65</sup> Through this compromise both the British and French goals were achieved.

The issue of the Salonika front again presented itself at the Second Chantilly Conference. Romania entered the war in 1916 as an Ally and was quickly crushed by a combined offensive by the Central Powers.<sup>66</sup> Joffre wanted to attack Bulgaria from Salonika with a force of a force of seven British, six French, six Serbian, three Italian, and one Russian divisions to improve their situation in the Balkans.<sup>67</sup> The problem at Chantilly was the Italians. Italy had declared war on Germany and its generals were worried about a German attack through neutral Switzerland. They did not want to shift forces outside their main theater without proper assurances that this avenue was covered. Although Joffre assured them that they would be supported if the Germans attacked from the north, it was not enough. Even Russian support failed to get the Italians to commit.<sup>68</sup> The Salonika issue remained unresolved as the Second Chantilly Conference closed. The final agreement included provisions for the attack, and listed the divisional requirements Joffre wanted, but the Italian commitment was merely a 'request' and not a firm promise

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 515.

<sup>66</sup> Churchill, 3:143-147.

<sup>67</sup> Joffre, 509.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 509-511.

of support.<sup>69</sup> In the end Italian forces took part in the attack as a part of the joint Allied army, but the expedition's attempts of 1917 failed despite them.<sup>70</sup>

The examples of Allied cooperation prior to 1918 are numerous. In each instance the Allies came to a decision that balanced their national aspirations. When disagreements were more pronounced, often a nation was willing to bend in order to maintain unity within the alliance. The US declaration of war in April 1917 added another partner for the Allied strategy to address. Fortunately, the Allies had three years of coalition experience behind them and were adept at finding compromises to complex problems.

#### British and French Coordination on the Western Front

Just as the coordination of strategy and the balancing of objectives evolved throughout the war, so too did the command relationships on the western front. One of the major challenges for a coalition in wartime is the command of the various national armies. The primary hurdles to a unified command on the western front were the sentiments of the British public and the commanders of the BEF. The Allies were unable to overcome these issues during the first three years of the war, and were forced to adapt a parallel command structure to meet the German threat. The early actions of the BEF in 1914, the Fall and Spring Offensives of 1915, the Somme of 1916, and the Nivelle Offensive of 1917 demonstrate the methods that the French and British used to coordinate on the western front. By understanding their experiences during this time, it

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 513.

<sup>70</sup> Gilbert, 331-332.

provides a background for further comparison after April 1917 when the Allies had to content with a third partner in France.

The most decisive action of the BEF in 1914 was its role during the Battle of the Marne. In general terms, the battle marked the end of the German drive through northern France. Stopped by a combined French and British counter attack between two German armies, it caused the German high command to call off the Schlieffen Plan and began the transition towards trench warfare.<sup>71</sup>

Leading up to and during the battle the British and French armies were faced with a singular strategic objective: Stop the German offensive. By early September the forces of Britain and France had been pushed south towards Paris. Attempts to stop the German drive by the British at the Battle of the Mons (August 23rd) and at Le Cateau (August 26th) and by the French 5th Army at Guise (August 29th) had failed.<sup>72</sup>

There was no overall Allied commander in 1914, instead communication between the French and British armies was conducted through liaisons.<sup>73</sup> For example, when the BEF and French 5th Army fought at Mons, both Sir John French and General Charles Lanrezac were fighting shoulder to shoulder against the Germans.<sup>74</sup> When Lanrezac was forced to retreat on August 23rd, General French was notified. Although the BEF

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<sup>71</sup> Barnett, 93-94.

<sup>72</sup> Willmott, 43.

<sup>73</sup> Barnett, 53.

<sup>74</sup> Gilbert, 56.

commander wanted to stand and fight, he was forced to withdraw lest his flank be left open by the retreating French.<sup>75</sup>

Beyond the lack of a clear command structure was the problem of national priorities. The French armies under Joffre were firmly fixed on stopping the German drive through France. General French, on the other hand, had different priorities. Sustaining heavy losses at Mons and at Le Cateau, French felt the remaining strength of the BEF must be saved. His priority was to husband the British forces and if necessary prepare to evacuate his army. On August 31st, he notified London that he was withdrawing the BEF and abandoning the continent. The British government sent Lord Kitchener to France who in turn pressed him to stay and keep fighting.<sup>76</sup>

On September 2nd, the French government abandoned Paris.<sup>77</sup> It was at this point that a gap began to open between the German 1st and 2nd Armies. Joffre sought to exploit the gap through a counteroffensive that we know today as the Battle of the Marne. In their retreat south, the BEF and the French 5th Army were poised to exploit widening gap between the German armies and a new French army, the 6th, was created to block German advances against Paris.<sup>78</sup> On September 5th the joint British and French counterattack began, and by the 12th the German march through Belgium and France was stopped.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 64

<sup>77</sup> Barnett, 70.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 76.

Thus, the Battle of the Marne presents us a valuable lesson: Without a supreme commander, coordination between national generals was crucial to securing success at the front. Here the success of the Marne was due to the armies of Britain and France coordinating their actions. Joined by the same overarching strategic goal, the forces under Joffre and French worked together without a clear chain of command. Joffre, leading the larger French forces, directed the overall course of the battle. Not directly subordinated to him, French worked with Joffre due to common goals, the direction of the British government, and his force of personality. Without a will to create a singular commander of Allied armies in France, the command relationships established in 1914 continued.<sup>79</sup>

The cooperation between General's Joffre and French continued throughout 1915. The British were unwilling to place the BEF under the direction of a French commander, which hampered the cooperation between the two armies. Instead of tackling the problems of a parallel command structure, they reinforced their differences by operating on different sections of the front and created unity of action by timing their offensives simultaneously. The spring offensive, aimed at Vimy Ridge (French) and Neuve Chapelle (British) and the fall offensive, aimed at Champagne (French) and Loos (British), both failed to achieve their objectives.<sup>80</sup> In both cases the Germans managed to defeat one of the armies quickly and then shifted reserves to meet the other. The failures of 1915 taught the British and French to combine their efforts to the same section of the front. Although

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<sup>79</sup> Churchill, 3:9.

<sup>80</sup> Willmott, 104-107.

they corrected this mistake in 1916, they made new errors when pressing their attack against the Germans.

The Battle of the Somme was conceived at Chantilly in December 1915 and was supposed to be the main effort in the west during 1916, in it the French would lead the attack supported by the British.<sup>81</sup> The German attacks at Verdun in February steadily syphoned French manpower needed for the offensive, so that by the time the Allies met in May the British and French roles were reversed.<sup>82</sup> General French had been replaced as commander of the BEF in December, leaving Haig in charge of planning the Somme Offensive, which was planned for July 1st.<sup>83</sup>

Planning for the battle was a constant struggle for its main architects, its overall goal being to relieve pressure on the French at Verdun and the destruction of the German forces.<sup>84</sup> Haig sought to achieve this through a decisive breakthrough, whereas General Ferdinand Foch, commanding the French forces, saw the battle for what it would become: one of attrition.<sup>85</sup> Ultimately the British plan won through owing to the size of the British forces involved.

The Battle of the Somme illustrates how Britain and France cooperation evolved over the course of the war. Prior to 1916 they had avoided engagements at the junction in

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<sup>81</sup> Churchill, 3:61-62.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 3:61-62.

<sup>83</sup> Philpott, 118.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 102, 122.

their armies, now they actively sought it as the source of their strength. The lack of support for an overall commander hindered the offensive, but it was still a step towards greater unity between the British and French forces on the western front. This fact frustrated Haig's coordination of the battle, however. When Foch disagreed with Haig about the purpose of the battle, he was free to do what he wished with his French armies. Even as Haig was planning for a decisive breakthrough of the German lines, Foch was looking for an attritional battle that would wear the Germans down.<sup>86</sup> The Somme therefore illustrates how the Allies attempted to solve the problems of joint action on the western front, but without taking the leap towards an overall Commander-in-Chief.

New leadership within Britain and France gave hope for a unified commander on the western front in 1917, but old rivalries and political opposition dashed these quickly. The unified strategy the Allies agreed to during the second Inter-Allied Conference at Chantilly in November 1916 was beset by problems from the beginning. The strategy required them to closely time their individual offensives, in order to reduce the chances of the Central Powers shifting reserves from one front to the other.<sup>87</sup> Within a month of the Chantilly meeting Nivelle replaced Joffre as French Commander-in-Chief and David Lloyd George replaced Asquith as the British prime minister. This leadership shuffle affected the Allies' ability to coordinate their plans.<sup>88</sup> First, both Nivelle and Haig had

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>87</sup> Douglas Haig, *Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches, December 1915-April 1919* (London: Dent, 1979), 81.

<sup>88</sup> David French, *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition, 1916-1918* (Oxford England: Clarendon Press, 1995), 51.

differing ideas on what was best in 1917. Nivelle planned to expand Joffre's original plan for an attack on the salient in the German lines that bulged roughly from Arras to Soissons.<sup>89</sup> Haig on the other hand, wanted to attack in Flanders. In the end, Haig agreed to the French plan, mollified because the British were playing a supporting role and could shift to a campaign in Flanders later in the year if necessary.<sup>90</sup>

Lloyd George preferred to support an Italian attack for the main Allied thrust of 1917. He doubted the likelihood of victory in France in 1917, and felt that with the support of British heavy artillery the Italians could break the stalemate on the Isonzo.<sup>91</sup> He presented his plan at the January 1917 Allied conference in Rome whereupon the Allies flatly rejected it. The Italians did not want to bear the brunt of the effort and the British generals didn't want to split their forces between Italy and France.<sup>92</sup>

Lloyd George came around to Nivelle's plan by early 1917 for three reasons. The BEF was in a supporting role, Nivelle promised victory in 1917, and it was scheduled early enough in 1917 to allow for further attacks elsewhere if necessary.<sup>93</sup> Another facet of Lloyd George's rationale was that Nivelle dampened the influence of Haig, who Lloyd

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<sup>89</sup> Churchill, 3:185.

<sup>90</sup> French, 56.

<sup>91</sup> David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, 1917-1918* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936), 218-219.

<sup>92</sup> French, 53.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

George didn't like or trust.<sup>94</sup> At a meeting in Calais in February, ostensibly meeting to resolve supply issues for the BEF, Lloyd George proposed that the BEF be placed under Nivelle's control. He did not proposed the change in command relationship because it offered greater unity of effort, but in order to diminish Haig's influence.<sup>95</sup> The backlash from those at home in Britain and from the commanders of the BEF was sharp and quick. Within days of Lloyd George's proposal, a compromise was created where the British armies remained under Haig but the battle would be directed by Nivelle.<sup>96</sup> Lloyd George's bungling proposal for a unified command set that effort back for over a year.

Although the Nivelle offensive had other more visible and devastating effects for the Allies in 1917, one often overlooked casualty was the Allied search for a unified command. 1917 continued as another year of parallel command between the British and French, one reliant on personalities, vague agreements and multiple conferences. Despite Lloyd George's proposal at Calais, the timing simply was not right for a unified command and his proposal delayed true improvements in the Allied command structure for another year. Ultimately it was German battlefield success that overcame British opposition to an Allied commander-in-chief but this did not happen until 1918.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Lloyd George, 222. The British prime minister was famous for disliking Douglas Haig. For example, at one point in his memoirs, Lloyd George refers to the "stubborn and stick mind of the British Commander," i.e., Haig.

<sup>95</sup> French, 56.

<sup>96</sup> Willmott, 206.

<sup>97</sup> Historical Division, Department of the Army, *United States Army in the World War: 1917-1919, Policy-Forming Documents American Expeditionary Forces*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1948), 323.

The events from 1914 to 1917 illuminate how the British and French worked though the issues of a parallel command structure. During this time neither side was willing to subordinate their forces under the command of the other. The results were a series of disconnected offensives in 1915 and joint failures in 1916 and 1917. None of these failures were sufficient to overcome British resistance towards a unified commander. Overall, the existing relationships and coordination was sufficient for them to allow the parallel command structure to continue. The AEF was incorporated into this structure as American forces arrived in France. Understanding how it was formed and how the Allies adapted to the challenges of this time is therefore instrumental for later comparison for the events of 1918.

### Chapter Conclusions

The Allies faced several challenges in coordinating their strategy as a coalition. Primarily, they faced the problems of creating a unified strategy. As the war progressed, they met more frequently and expanded their conferences to include all the members of the alliance. This solution solved the problems of 1914 and 1915 when the Allies effectively had no unified strategy. Throughout the first three years of the war, they also struggled to balance their national priorities with those of the alliance. In the end, they were relatively effective in finding ways to meet the needs of their partners. Some nations held more sway than others, but ultimately all sacrificed some priorities for the overall good of the coalition. Finally, the French and British were challenged by the effects of a parallel command structure in France. Early actions between their armies supported the overall belief through 1917 that each army should operate independently and merely

coordinate their actions for mutual benefit. Attempts in 1917 to create a unified command structure failed due to timing, tact, and political opposition.

Despite the abilities of the Allies to overcome these challenges, the strategy they created during this time was a failure. Although they agreed to a single plan of action, it rarely brought their maximum strengths to the field simultaneously in such a way to defeat the Central Powers. From a purely objective standpoint, the Central Powers defeated the armies of Belgium (1914), Serbia (1915), Romania (1916), Russia (1917) and Italy (1917) in turn. The allied attempts to forestall these defeats through conferences, agreements, and the improvements to their command structures proved inadequate.

Thus, the methods the Allies used to coordinate, balanced, and execute a unified strategy were established prior to the US entry. These mechanisms and agreements existed in April 1917 when the US declared war on Germany. During the buildup and subsequent use of American forces in Europe, they were subject to the Allied method of creating unified strategy. As the US established combat power in France, the Americans attempted to adapt the Allies methods to meet their needs.

## CHAPTER 3

### US POLICY AND STRATEGY

I don't care two hoots about America.<sup>98</sup>

— Erich Ludendorff

The interactions between the US and the Allies and Central Powers prior to April 1917 had a profound effect on American wartime policy and strategy. President Wilson was quick to declare neutrality upon the opening of hostilities in Europe, but was challenged to maintain this position in the face domestic issues and the belligerent actions of the Allies and Central Powers. The US position towards the conflict in Europe evolved over the course of 1914-1917, during which President Wilson focused on maintaining US neutrality and mediating a peace deal.

At first reluctant to support either side, economic, political, and popular interests slowly pushed the US into the war against the Germany. The overwhelming economic impact of Allied trade, combined with the atrocities and war-like acts of Germany and her partners, coalesced to push American public opinion into favoring a war against the German government. Identifying Germany as the true cause of the war and the source Europe's troubles, Wilson chose to focus American efforts on defeating the strongest member of the Central Powers while largely ignoring the others. Divergent political goals and British provocations at sea pushed the US and Allies apart so that when the US entered the war, it did so as an associate power instead of as a formal Ally. Although the

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<sup>98</sup> Asprey, 291.

US and Allies found common cause in a mutual enemy, the Americans otherwise desired political separation from them throughout the war.

US policy heavily influenced the US military strategy of the First World War. Wilson's desire to mediate a European peace during the years of American neutrality directly correlated to a US strategy focused on achieving victory in such a way to provide US ascendancy during the peace negotiations. As such, US strategy placed great emphasis on maintaining a distinctly American presence in the war, whether that was General Pershing's order to create an independent American army in France or the focus on defeating the armies of Germany on the western front. Both actions were necessary to ensure a dominant position for President Wilson in shaping the peace.

Understanding the US policy and strategy towards the First World War is central to this thesis. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Allied strategic course for the war was largely established prior to the US entry in April 1917. As such, the US entrance could either change the Allied strategy or be adapted into it. In both cases, it is important to understand the American position towards the war to understand how the two interacted. This chapter analyzes the US policy first during the period of neutrality prior to April 1917 and then that which came immediately after the US declaration of war. It also examines the US military strategy that was created between April and June 1917. This examination is important in laying the foundation for later comparison as the Allies and US worked to mesh their priorities and strategies to combat the Central Powers.

#### US Policy: July 1914–April 1917

President Wilson's policy prior to April 1917 was focused on two goals: maintaining US neutrality and attempting to broker a peace. The actions the Allies and

Central Powers took to restrict neutral trade constantly frustrated President Wilson as he attempted to achieve these goals. The Allied economic blockade of Europe and Germany's submarine campaigns placed enormous strain on relations between the US and the European belligerents. Diplomacy was the tool of choice to protest violations of neutrality at sea and had little effect on the Allied and German actions. US diplomacy also extended to the search for a peace agreement, which Wilson was heavily invested in lest the US be drawn into the war. He also desired influence in shaping the events in Europe to create a League of Nations and foster self-determination across the continent.

This section first analyzes how the US attempted to maintain its neutrality in the face of Allied and German provocations at sea. Next, it examines how President Wilson's failed attempts to broker a peace shaped his impressions of European politics. Both ultimately formed his opinions towards the European belligerents and influenced the manner of US entry into the war and the wartime policies his administration pursued to achieve an American peace.

### The War on Neutral Trade

President Woodrow Wilson declared US neutrality to the conflict in Europe on August 4, 1914, shortly after the German invasion of western Europe. Although popular opinion was generally towards the Allied cause, there was little pressure from public sentiment for a US declaration of war.<sup>99</sup> The distance from the battlefields, traditional American attitudes towards entanglement in European politics, and economic interests at

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<sup>99</sup> Michael S. Neiberg, *The Path to War, How the First World War Created Modern America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 32, 37-38.

home separated Americans from a war they saw as Europe's problem. In his address to Congress on August 17, 1914, President Wilson urged Americans to be, "impartial in thought, as well as action" towards the war in Europe.<sup>100</sup> The struggle to maintain US neutrality latter effects on US wartime policy. The hostile acts of Britain negatively impacted US-British relations, but not to the extent necessary to preclude US-Allied cooperation after April 1917. Conversely, Germany's actions on the high-seas directly lead to the US declaration of war in April 1917.

The economic connections that grew with the Allied nations made maintaining US neutrality difficult. In the first great industrial war, trade was a major weapon against one's enemy. Britain's Royal Navy and large merchant marine enabled her to continue worldwide trade as well as implement a distant blockade of Germany. The most effective weapon Germany had to blockade the British Isles were the submarine and minefield. Both means turned American sentiment against them given the loss of innocent life they imposed. Actions by both Britain and Germany to restrict trade to their enemies inflamed US passions against the war. Offset by the economic gains from Allied trade, the war on the seas set US policy against Germany but did not seriously affect US-British relations.

The Allies caused some of the first diplomatic outbursts from the US over their conduct of naval operations against the Central Powers. The joint British and French blockade against German and Austrian ports began on August 12, 1914.<sup>101</sup> The British implemented a distant blockade of the continent, focused on limiting contraband coming

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<sup>100</sup> FirstWorldWar.com, "U.S. Declaration of Neutrality," August 19, 1914, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/usneutrality.htm>.

<sup>101</sup> Gilbert, 46-47.

from neutral nations to the Central Powers.<sup>102</sup> The British interpreted contraband to be anything useful to a nation in wartime, including food.<sup>103</sup> Although the British attempted to restrict the items listed in order to limit US protest, their economic policy nonetheless served as a barrier to US-British relations.<sup>104</sup> In much the same way that the various Allies balanced their strategic needs, so did Britain and the US during the period of US neutrality, this in turn set the stage for US-British cooperation after April 1917. American trade with Britain was vital to their war effort, and the Americans were too enticed by economic gain to protest heavily against British offensives. US outrage towards the Allied blockade was tempered by British efforts to leave items off of the contraband list that harmed US relations (such as cotton).<sup>105</sup> In the same vein, Wilson's diplomatic protests against the British actions were firm but carried little enforcement.<sup>106</sup> Ultimately neither side was willing to cut ties with the other, which tended to reduce the responses to offensive British actions.

As the war dragged on, US trade with the Allied nations increased well beyond pre-war levels. For example, US export of foodstuffs increased 25 percent between 1914

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<sup>102</sup> The British blockaded Germany by requiring neutral ships to put into British ports before continuing onto their destination to ensure that they were not carrying contraband. Martin Gilbert argues that the British blockage was, "only dangerous to those ships which declined to put into British ports. In two years, only five American ships were sunk, and four American lives lost, as a result of American-registered merchant ships refusing to comply with the British blockade." See Gilbert, 102-103.

<sup>103</sup> Neiberg, 66, 253, note 1.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 121.

and 1915, nearly all the increase going to Allied nations.<sup>107</sup> The economic imbalance applied to financial loans as well, which in turn were used to supply even more to the Allies. By 1917 the loans to the Allies were 75 times greater than those to the Central Powers.<sup>108</sup> Thus the US supplied the coal, steel, copper, explosives, cotton, food, and munitions for the Allies to wage war against the Central Powers.<sup>109</sup>

Although the Allies had a large monopoly over trade with the US during this time, they also continued to upset US relations with their naval activities. For example, in August 1915 a British armed merchantman sailed under false US colors. When a U-boat approached to attack, the merchantman raised the British standard and opened fire, killing the crew of the U-boat. US-British relations were strained over the affair, but nothing ultimately came of it beyond the normal diplomatic talk.<sup>110</sup> The effective monopoly of trade with the Allies gave little incentive for the US to take a harder line against the British blockade of Germany.

Simultaneous with the Allied actions at sea were German provocations within the US homeland. Cigar bombs were used to attack merchantman sailing from US ports and German agents attempted to bribe US newspapers into printing German propaganda and encouraged labor strife within German-American workers.<sup>111</sup> The atrocities of the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>108</sup> Willmott, 196.

<sup>109</sup> Harbord, 6.

<sup>110</sup> Gilbert, 188.

<sup>111</sup> Neiberg, 78, 80-81.

Central Powers in Europe, whether it was the treatment of Belgian civilians or the Armenian Genocide, similarly supported American hostility towards the German nation.<sup>112</sup> As American attitudes towards the war and Germany started to change, so too did Wilson's attitudes. Despite German sabotage and spying within the US proper, the largest issue between Germany and the US was the German U-boat.

A lack of options forced the submarine to become the weapon of choice against Allied shipping. Most of the German surface raiding activity was swept from the seas by the end of 1914, and reluctance to use the High Seas Fleet for fear of its destruction left few conventional naval forces to stop the British blockade.<sup>113</sup> Additionally, within six months of the start of the war, Germany and Austria-Hungary were deprived of 61 percent of their merchant fleets.<sup>114</sup> By having their ships either captured, sunk, or moored in neutral ports, the Central Powers lost much of their connection to foreign trade markets. The Germans needed to reach outside markets and combat the Allied blockade, but had few 'legal' tools with which to do this. Their first act was to mine the North Sea on the second day of the war, in direct contravention of the Second Hague Convention of 1907.<sup>115</sup> This wiliness to use illegal, destructive methods to execute their war against the British at sea set the tone for later German policies and US relations.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 26-29, 97-98.

<sup>113</sup> Willmott, 173; Falkenhayn, 18.

<sup>114</sup> Willmott, 176.

<sup>115</sup> Gilbert, 102.

Germany first turned to Unrestricted Submarine Warfare (USW) in February, 1915. Prior to this, submarine attacks against shipping had observed the “Cruiser Rules” or “Prize Regulations” that required a U-boat to stop a merchantman, inspect the ship for contraband, and allow the crew to evacuate prior to sinking.<sup>116</sup> USW was distinctly different in that submarines could open fire on merchantmen without any prior notice. Despite its aggressive nature, the German High Command considered USW as a defensive tool to fight back against, “the blatant violations of international law by England” that “consisted of the war of starvation which had been initiated against the non-combatant population of Germany, including old men, women, and children.”<sup>117</sup> The German staff recognized that USW would alienate the US and other neutrals, but were encouraged by the mild reactions to Allied violations of US neutrality. According to General Erich Falkenhayn (then Chief of the German General Staff):

In the face of the grave violations of international law by the Entente, the Government in Washington had restricted itself to protests, and, indeed, had said nothing when these protests remained unanswered. As things stood, it was not evident why it should adopt a different attitude to Germany’s action, which, as a counter-measure, was incomparably more justifiable.<sup>118</sup>

Otherwise stated, the US had used diplomatic means to protest the illegal Allied campaign, so there was little reason to assume the US would do otherwise against the defensive German campaign.

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<sup>116</sup> David Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall, Victory and Defeat in 1918*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 19; Willmott, 173.

<sup>117</sup> Falkenhayn, 77.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

The first German unrestricted submarine campaign was a failure. It sank only 748,00 tons of shipping in 1915 and was unable to stop the flow of goods to the Allies.<sup>119</sup> Contrary to Falkenhayn's expectations, it did effect the relationship between the US and the Central Powers. The sinking of the passenger liner *Lusitania* in May 1915, with over 1,100 passengers, including over 100 Americans, incensed the US public and caused a storm of diplomatic protest from the US.<sup>120</sup> The sinking did not lead directly to a US declaration of war, but it furthered the American impression of German barbarism. It contributed to the feeling in America that the Allies were fighting a just war against an enemy that had perpetrated the rape of Belgium, the use of poison gas, and other atrocities.<sup>121</sup> Although it did not push the US into the Allied camp, but it did push America away from Germany.

American animosity towards Germany increased in March 1916 when a U-boat torpedoed the passenger ferry SS *Sussex*. Wilson demanded Germany return to the Cruiser Rules when conducting attacks or face severed relations.<sup>122</sup> Germany responded with the "Sussex Pledge" in which they swore not to attack merchantmen and passenger ships.<sup>123</sup> The first German experiment with submarine warfare formally ended in April

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<sup>119</sup> Willmott, 179.

<sup>120</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *The Messages and Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 1, ed. Albert Shaw (New York, NY: The Review of Reviews Corporation, 1924), 1:239.

<sup>121</sup> Asprey, 214-215.

<sup>122</sup> Falkenhayn, 251-252.

<sup>123</sup> Neiberg, 107.

1916 due to the threat of severed diplomatic relations with the US.<sup>124</sup> At this point the German General Staff was certain that renewing unrestricted submarine warfare would bring the US into the war against them.<sup>125</sup> This episode focused US policy against Germany and reinforced in the American public's eye that Germany was an enemy with callous regard for the rules of civilized war.

By the end of 1916 the absolute war was taking its toll on the German people and economy. General Paul von Hindenburg with Ludendorff as his Chief of Staff took over control of the German General Staff and military in August 1916, so it was up to them to determine the course of the war from that point on. In his memoirs, Ludendorff remarked:

If the war lasted our defeat seemed inevitable. Economically we were in a highly unfavourable [sic] position for a war of exhaustion. At home our strength was badly shaken. Questions of the supply of foodstuffs caused great anxiety, and so, too, did questions of *moral*. We were not undermining the spirits of the enemy populations with starvation blockades and propaganda. The future looked dark, and our only comfort was to be found in the proud thought that we had hitherto succeeded in defying a superior enemy, and that our line was everywhere beyond our frontiers [emphasis original].<sup>126</sup>

In short, time was Germany's main enemy. By the winter of 1916 and 1917, Ludendorff concluded, "Unrestricted submarine warfare was now the only means left to secure a victorious end to the war within a reasonable time."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Willmott, 179.

<sup>125</sup> Falkenhayn, 254.

<sup>126</sup> Erich Friedrich Wilhelm Ludendorff, *My War Memories, 1914-1918* (London: Hutchison and Co., 1919), 1:307.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:312.

The failures of the previous campaign were remedied with the construction of 100 U-boats in 1916, giving the German High Command a renewed sense of confidence that USW could end the war.<sup>128</sup> The Germans thought that a renewed campaign could bring Britain to its knees within six months, far faster than any expected US intervention.<sup>129</sup> The German estimate was based on appreciations of freight space per soldier and concluded that it would take the US a year to get a mere five or six divisions into Europe.<sup>130</sup> Beyond this, it would take nearly five million tons of shipping space to support one million men, an amount of tonnage that the Allies could not support even temporarily.<sup>131</sup> They concluded that if the US entered the war, the American military contributions to the conflict would be negligible. Because of this, Ludendorff remarked, “I don’t care two hoots about America.”<sup>132</sup>

The Germans notified the US on January 31, 1917 that they were resuming USW. Wilson quickly broke off diplomatic relations on February 3rd, but stopped short of requesting a declaration of war.<sup>133</sup> As he had done previously, diplomatic pressure was his first response to the renewed German aggression. Once the Germans began to sink

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<sup>128</sup> Asprey, 290, 292.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 293-294.

<sup>130</sup> Ludendorff, 1:314.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 1:316.

<sup>132</sup> Asprey, 291.

<sup>133</sup> Sterling J. Kernek, *Distraction of Peace During War: The Lloyd George Government’s reactions to Woodrow Wilson, December, 1916-November, 1918*, (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1975), 36.

American ships regularly, Wilson could take no more. Just over two months after the Germans restarted USW, the President asked Congress for a declaration of war.

The combination of German atrocities in Europe, actions against the US homeland, and the USW set Germany as the enemy in the eyes of Americans and President Wilson. This focused US wartime policy and strategy against the German Empire, and not her partners. Diplomatic pressure during 1915 and 1916 ended the first German use of unrestricted submarine warfare, but was not enough to stop the second in 1917. By then Germany had given up on keeping the US out of the war, and saw the submarine campaign as the quickest way to end the war on German terms. Although the new round of unrestricted submarine warfare unleashed in 1917 provided the bulk of the argument for joining war, it was ultimately the slew of callous acts that built the case for the average American to support a war against Germany. As such, when President Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war on Germany (and only Germany) on April 2, 1917, the nation was behind him.

### US Attempts to Broker Peace

During the first years of the war President Wilson attempted to broker a peace to the European war. As time went on he saw himself increasingly as a possible mediator, and tried several times to bring the belligerents together. This interest in having a strong hand in shaping events in Europe and influencing the peace deal had a significant effect on the US policy towards the war after April 1917.

Wilson first attempted informal mediation to the First World War through his unofficial diplomat, 'Colonel' Edward M. House. Arriving in Europe in February 1915, House's letter of introduction from Wilson demonstrates the early qualities of Wilson's

approach to a European peace deal. It proposed that the President act as a conduit for the European belligerents to communicate through, and sought no advantage for the US other than to see peace return to the continent.<sup>134</sup> The failure of the first US-mediated peace set the pattern for those that came latter. House arrived in Europe and met with the different powers, none of which were interested in peace. Issues of territory, compensation, and the military situation frustrated House's efforts.<sup>135</sup> Failing in his efforts to encourage talks for peace, House did impress his European guests.<sup>136</sup> The respect he earned ensured he was the man of choice for further US overtures towards the Allies and Central Powers.

House was sent back to Europe in early 1916 as part of a renewed effort for a US-brokered peace. He met with the Germans, British, and French leaders and diplomats to find a way for the US to lead a peace conference. He faced many of the same issues he saw in his 1915 visit, but was able to come to an unofficial understanding with the Allies that if they called for a peace conference, then the US would propose one on their behalf. If Germany did not accept the invitation, then the US would probably join the war with the Allies.<sup>137</sup> Unfortunately, this happened while the US was attempting to settle the ongoing dispute with Germany over the *Lusitania* sinking. The sinking of the *Sussex* that month created additional tension between the US and Germany. The Allies interpreted

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<sup>134</sup> Edward Mandell House, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, volumes 1-4, ed. Charles Seymour (London: Hasell, Watson and Viney, 1926), 1:360, 1:367. It is ironic that when House sailed to Europe, he did so on the *Lusitania*, which was sunk shortly thereafter in March.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:370, 1:372, 1:377, 1:380-381.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:397.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:201-202.

US willingness to use diplomatic talks in the face of blatant German aggression as a sign of weakness. As such, it lessened their interest in the agreement for peace talks and House's proposal came to nothing.<sup>138</sup>

Wilson initiated another plan for peace talks after his re-election in November 1916. His slogan, "He kept us out of war" during the election campaign was apt up to that point, but was tested during the fall and winter months as hints of a German resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare surfaced.<sup>139</sup> Wilson sent a note to the belligerents in December 1916 asking for a statement of their terms on which the war could be ended.<sup>140</sup> Again, the aims of neither side could be balanced, and this effort for peace on Wilson's terms also came to nothing.<sup>141</sup> Wilson had done everything he could up to this point to broker a peace but the belligerents were not willing to cooperate. The lack of satisfactory replies prompted his famous call for "a peace without victory" in a speech to the Senate on January 22, 1917.<sup>142</sup>

The US did not have enough leverage to force the belligerents to the table. Finding a negotiated settlement that met the needs of both sides was nearly impossible at this point in the war.<sup>143</sup> Wilson's attempts to broker a peace supported America's high

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 2:233.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 2:389-390.

<sup>140</sup> Wilson, 1: 345.

<sup>141</sup> Asprey, 290.

<sup>142</sup> Wilson, 1:352.

<sup>143</sup> House, 1:369.

moral standing throughout the war. He could rightly claim he had taken every step necessary short of war to bring peace to Europe.

A common American frustration with the Allies and Central Powers was the vagueness of their claims. Wilson summed up his feelings with these remarks:

We are holding off, not because we do not feel concerned, but because when we exert the force of this nation we want to know what we are exerting it for. . . Define the elements, let us know that we are not fighting for the prevalence of this nation over that, for the ambitions of this group of nations as compared with the ambitions of that group of nations, let us once be convinced that we are called in to a great combination to fight for the rights of mankind and America will unite her force and spill her blood for the great things which she was always believed in and followed.<sup>144</sup>

From the moment the war started, each side had envisioned what they would gain from it. The aims of both sides were mutually exclusive, and the chances of a negotiated peace were slim to none. It did not help that each side appeared selfish in their dealings, even “cheerfully” at times carving up the spoils.<sup>145</sup> This fact directly impacted Wilson’s desire not to join the Allies after the US declared war on Germany. The Treaty of London in 1915, which ensured Italy’s entry as an Ally, exemplifies US frustrations with the Allies.<sup>146</sup> Signed in secret and promising Austrian territory for the Italians after the war, it supported the belief that the Allies were fighting for land and not for the betterment of mankind. At no point was the US sure that they would be fighting ‘for the rights of mankind’ and not some additional territory on behalf of a European partner. The US

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 2:205.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 2:181.

<sup>146</sup> Willmott, 73.

joined as an associate specifically to avoid these political entanglements and enable Wilson to pursue his goals for the peace separate from those of the Allies.

There are many direct ties between the US policies prior to April 1917 and those that came after the US declaration of war on Germany. The close economic ties between the Allies and US offset many of the Allied violations of US neutrality and rights. On the other hand, the continued German policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, especially after the *Sussex* Pledge, was bellicose in nature and highly provocative. The conclusion here is that if the US did enter the war, it would be against Germany. America simply had too much too loose by breaking ties with the Allies, and Germany was becoming too confrontational to ignore.

The actions of the Allies and their war aims conflicted with those of President Wilson. Exposed during House's attempts to mediate and broker a peace agreement on Wilson's behalf, Americans understood the Allies were fighting for reasons averse to the President's aims. The secretive nature of their treaties, their desire for territory and benefit to the detriment of the people of Europe were against Wilson's ideals. Once the US declared war on Germany, it was vital that the US not support Allied colonial and territorial expansion. As such, the US entered the war as an associate and not an Ally. For Wilson to achieve a peace 'for the rights of mankind' he had to keep his separation from Allied politics.

### US Wartime Policy

The US declaration of war came on April 6, 1917. The Germans had restarted USW in February, and Wilson broke off relations shortly thereafter. Tensions mounted when Arthur Zimmerman, then German State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, sent a note to

Mexico offering German support for a Mexican war against the US. He proposed that if war erupted between the US and Germany, Mexico should join the conflict as a Central Power and in-turn would be receive German materiel to regain the “lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.”<sup>147</sup> Released to the public on February 28th, the telegram supported the US entry into war. Pressure mounted for the US to enter the war in the following weeks, especially after the passenger liner *Laconia* was sunk in late February, and four merchantmen were sunk between March 12th and 18th, violating the Sussex Pledge.<sup>148</sup> The combination of Zimmerman telegram and the sinking of US ships went too far. On March 21st, the President requested Congress meet 12 days later to discuss matters of “national policy”.<sup>149</sup>

Wilson’s speech to congress on April 2, 1917 laid out the causes of the US entry into the First World War along with the American policy for waging the war. The policy was influenced by his experiences dealing with the belligerents and his goal of having a hand in determining the peace. In his address, President Wilson outlined two major themes that were the basis of US policy and actions during the war. First, the war was against the German government and not its people and second, the US would aid and assist the Allies in their war efforts but the US would remain a separate, associate power.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Asprey, 300.

<sup>148</sup> Kernek, 43.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Wilson, 1: 376.

When Wilson requested a declaration of war, he directed it against the government of Germany and not its peoples or the other members of the Central Powers.<sup>151</sup> Wilson saw German militant autocracy as the cause of the war and the main hurdle to a European peace. The idea of “Two Germanys” embodied the idea that one Germany was its people; humanistic, scientific, and worthy of praise, had been overcome by the other, namely Prussian militarism.<sup>152</sup> As the source of conflict, Prussian militarism became the focus of American efforts, which had consequences for US wartime policy which largely ignored the other members of the Central Powers. Wilson specifically noted that he was not asking for war against Austria-Hungary, who had, “not actually engaged in warfare against citizens of the United States on the seas.”<sup>153</sup> War did come later against Austria in December 1917, but only as a show of support for the Italians after their defeat at Caporetto.<sup>154</sup> The Allies consistently sought to siphon US troops for other theaters, primarily to Russia. Minor forces were sent there later in the war to placate the Allies, but the bulk of US forces the priority for the AEF was the fight against Germany in France. Wilson’s focus on the German government made sense given his earlier experiences. Germany was the main aggressor against the US, as well as was the strongest and most influential member of the Central Powers. Similarly, the autocratic

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 1:378, 381.

<sup>152</sup> Neiberg, 11-12.

<sup>153</sup> Wilson, 1: 381.

<sup>154</sup> Stevenson, 95.

government in Germany was the reason for the various atrocities and was the primary threat to freedom and self-determination across Europe.

The second implication from his speech was that the US planned to fight alongside the Allies, but would not join them. Instead, the US entered the war as an associate power.<sup>155</sup> This meant that there was no formal treaty binding the US to the Allied cause, and Wilson could rightly say that he was fighting for freedom and the ideals he inevitably espoused in his Fourteen Points. Wary of the various secret treaties amongst the Allies to carve up Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia, this move was made to keep US war interests pure. Wilson differentiated the American position towards the war from the Allies by stating:

We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedoms of nations can make them.<sup>156</sup>

Wilson saw the war as the last resort enable, “free and self-governed peoples.”<sup>157</sup> The Allies planned to incorporate the lands conquered as new territory or colonies. This was contrary to Wilson’s ideals about freedom and his place in ensuring it as a bulwark against further conflict. On a practical side, Wilson’s decision to declare war on Germany but not join the Allies had more diplomatic than military repercussions.<sup>158</sup> The greatest

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<sup>155</sup> Harbord, 17.

<sup>156</sup> Wilson, 1: 381

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 1:378.

<sup>158</sup> David F. Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking, 1917-1918* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 3.

effect for the US military was the lack of a political appointee on the Supreme War Council, the effects of which are discussed later in chapter 4. On the battlefield, this distinction had a lesser effect, as the AEF fought alongside the Allies unencumbered by the US political separation.

Overall the goal of the US policy was to ensure a seat at the peace table. Wilson sought to achieve this by focusing his efforts on defeating Germany who he saw as the primary menace to the peace he wished to impose. By entering as an associate power and not an ally, he assumed he would not be sidelined by his partners at the peace table. Given this policy, the US crafted a strategy to ensure a US and Allied victory over the Central Powers that produced conditions for a Wilsonian peace.

#### US Wartime Strategy

US wartime strategy coalesced around three actions that were balanced to achieve President Wilson's political objectives. Although US policy towards the war was well established at the time the war was declared on Germany, the US strategy was not. It evolved quickly into a three-pronged approach. First, the nucleus the AEF was dispatched to Europe to bolster Allied morale and lay the logistical foundation for a future larger force. Second, the size of the army was increased to meet the needs of the war in Europe because in April 1917, the US Army and National Guard combined were barely 200,000 strong.<sup>159</sup> Creating a large army would take time, but ultimately provide the manpower necessary for Allied victory and would increase US influence more than a token force

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<sup>159</sup> Leonard P. Ayres, *The War with Germany A Statistical Summary* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), 16.

would have. Finally, the large American army in Europe would fight as an independent force on the western front. This provided leverage over the Allies, and ensured US manpower and prestige was not lost under the guise of support to Britain and France. This assumed that the large US presence would force the Allies to give Wilson a strong place at the peace table. This section evaluates the US wartime strategy, analyzing each of these three lines of effort to examine how they were developed and implemented, and to lay the groundwork for later comparison to Allied strategic decision making.

### US Show of Support

Three weeks after the US declaration of war diplomatic missions from Britain and France arrived in America. The British mission under the British foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, and the French mission under Premier Rene Viviani and Marshal Joffre did not agree on what the Allies needed from America.<sup>160</sup> One area of concurrence was the need for US manpower in Europe, and fast. During this time both Britain and France were faced with the realities of the failed Nivelle Offensive and its repercussions. Allied manpower was declining and the Americans arrived at an opportune time to offset Allied losses. However, the British and French missions disagreed on how the American should be employed. Joffre's report mentions the French desire for an American army to fight alongside France's, but prioritized an American show of support as soon as possible in order to bolster morale of the Allied troops.<sup>161</sup> For Joffre, the goal was to "show the

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<sup>160</sup> Harbord, 52, 57.

<sup>161</sup> Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 7-9.

American uniform” in France, regardless of its ability to fight.<sup>162</sup> The British mission wanted raw troops more than a show of force from the US Army, asking for 500,000 untrained men as soon as possible.<sup>163</sup> Fortunately for the Allies, the US had already decided to send what they wanted even before the Allies requested it.

On May 2nd, then Major General John J. Pershing was summoned to the War Department to organize and lead the expeditionary to Europe.<sup>164</sup> Pershing, his staff, and the forces that would become the 1st Division set sail for France on May 28th.<sup>165</sup> The effect of their arrival buoyed the spirits of the Allied peoples. General James Harbord, Pershing’s chief of staff at the time, recounts the American entry into Paris:

The thousands of spectators cheered to echo as they swung under the arch and into the outer court. They marched on to the tomb of La Fayette, perhaps three miles away, and every stride brought an ovation. Girls, women, and even men crowded into the old street, linked arms with the flank men of the fours, and swept down the boulevards in step with American music. Flowers were showered on them from every side, and the roar of cheers rose and seemed never to die away. It was a great day.<sup>166</sup>

Beyond the benefit to Allied morale, the arrival of the AEF in Europe laid the groundwork for the millions of US troops to follow. Between the time the first forces arrived June 1917 and the arrival of forces in mass a year later, General Pershing and his staff address such areas as training, supply, transportation, equipment, and doctrine.

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<sup>162</sup> Frederick Palmer, *Bliss, Peacemaker The Life and Letters of General Tasker Howard Bliss* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1934), 169.

<sup>163</sup> Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking*, 5.

<sup>164</sup> Pershing, 1:2.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:37.

<sup>166</sup> Harbord, 105.

Although the US forces in Europe did not fight during 1917, sending a force to Europe enabled the creation of the systems and infrastructure necessary for the divisions that made the difference in 1918.

Although the US was quick to send its show of support to the Allies, it did not take long for them to grow restless at the lack of additional forces. Although the 1st Division arrived in June, it did not enter the line until October, and it was not until five months later that the next US division was added to the tally of forces arrayed against the Germans on the western front.<sup>167</sup> Lloyd George remarked in his memoirs that “Both the French and ourselves were apprehensive lest, if it were not speeded up, it [US troops] would arrive too late to save the Allied Front from collapse in the face of formidable German attack.”<sup>168</sup> However, the seeds of the AEF were vital for the larger buildup, as they gave Pershing and his staff time to work out the details for the much larger force to follow. Even though the Allies grew impatient at the slow buildup of American troops, the efforts to send a force immediately had great value for the later role the AEF played in the war.

#### From 200,000 to Four Million Men

A key piece of the US strategy was the creation of a large expeditionary force for service in Europe. Beyond the requests from Britain and France for troops, this was an obvious way to increase Wilson’s hand at the peace table. The US could offer loans and

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<sup>167</sup> Ayres, 33.

<sup>168</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs 1917-1918*, 397.

material aid, but these had proved little use in his attempts to broker a peace prior to April 1917, and could not provide the leverage necessary for him to achieve his ends.

In his address to Congress on April 2nd, Wilson called for an army of 500,000 men through “universal liability service.”<sup>169</sup> At the time of the declaration of war the Regular Army was only 133,000 men and the National Guard 67,000 men.<sup>170</sup> Calls to enlarged the Army and Navy came prior to the declaration of war, most notably in June 1916 and March 1917, but none were implemented.<sup>171</sup> Congress quickly passed the Selective Service Act into law on May 18th, which in-turn provided the large amount of manpower needed for the future AEF.<sup>172</sup>

When Pershing set sail for France in June it was clear the AEF would be one of the largest American armies fielded in history, yet its final size was not decided. In his orders from General Bliss (then Acting Chief of Staff), Pershing was instructed to “direct preparations for the arrival of successive contingents of troops in France.”<sup>173</sup> The General Organization Project was a joint affair between Pershing’s staff and the War Department to study the number of men necessary.<sup>174</sup> Approved in July, it called for one million men,

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<sup>169</sup> Wilson, 1:376.

<sup>170</sup> Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking*, 4.

<sup>171</sup> Harbord, 22-24.

<sup>172</sup> Harbord, 26.

<sup>173</sup> Pershing, 1:39-40; Harbord, 65-66.

<sup>174</sup> Historical Division, Department of the Army, *United States Army in the World War: 1917-1919, Organization of the American Expeditionary Forces*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1948), 4.

an amount Pershing saw as the minimum necessary for the full range of operations in the modern war Europe was fighting. This was only enough for 1918, for the final campaign he would need at least three million men.<sup>175</sup>

Perhaps the most telling point about the AEF was not its size, but its purpose. Many in America saw the expeditionary force as the way to end the war. Bliss poignantly put this point across in a letter to Secretary of War Baker on May 25th: “the time has come for the English and the French to stand fast and wait until our reinforcements can reach them in such a way as to give *the final, shattering blow* [emphasis original].”<sup>176</sup> In effect, the administration and War Department were planning for a force that would succeed where the Allies had failed and would be large enough to defeat the Germans.

#### “A Separate and Distinct Component”

The third pillar of the US strategy towards the war was the employment of an independent army in France. The Allies desperately needed manpower to make good their losses from the previous three years of fighting, and immediately saw America as a source for more men. They initially pressed for amalgamation, which placed US units below divisional level into the British and French armies at various echelons. The Allies preferred amalgamation not only because it was fast, but it also gave them more certainty than trusting their fate to untested American army. For the US, providing the raw soldiers necessary for the Allies to win the war might have defeated Germany, but it would not have supported the administration’s policy towards the war. For Wilson to have his place

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<sup>175</sup> Pershing, 1:101.

<sup>176</sup> Palmer, 154.

at the peace table, it was important that an American Army fight in Europe, not just small packets of US fighting units under direction of Allied commanders.

When Pershing sailed for France, he did so with two sets of letters of instruction; one each from Baker and Bliss. Both letters are very similar, but there is one significant difference between them. Both Pershing and Harbord point out in their memoirs that the Baker letter instructed Pershing that, “the underlying idea must be kept in view that the forces of the United States are a separate and distinct component of the combined forces, the identity of which must be preserved.”<sup>177</sup> Besides the letters, Pershing discussed this point with Secretary Baker prior to his departure and clearly understood the policy that he should follow when forming the AEF.<sup>178</sup>

Pershing’s battle between his instructions to maintain a separate American army and the desires and machinations of the Allies collectively became known as the amalgamation controversy. From the American perspective, there was little Allied thought to the employment of American manpower outside of amalgamation.<sup>179</sup> The fear within the US Army was that if their forces were amalgamated, they would lose not only their identity as American forces, but that America would lose its influence over how

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<sup>177</sup> Harbord, 66.

<sup>178</sup> Pershing, 1:40.

<sup>179</sup> Harbord, 58. Harbord states of these missions, “there was no other idea advanced for using American troops except to amalgamate them in Allied Units.” This is also corroborated in Pershing, 1: 30, “The French really wanted us to send small, untrained units for incorporation in their divisions. Their views were clearly set forth in a memorandum by the French General Staff which was presented by their Military Attaché. Marshal Joffre, of the French Mission, however, evidently learned that such a proposal would not appeal to us, so he suggested that we also organize our own divisions.”

those forces were used, and have less say during the peace. The instructions from Baker to Pershing as he left for Europe were designed to forestall amalgamation except in “minor exceptions in particular circumstances” as Pershing approved.<sup>180</sup>

Ultimately the bulk of the US forces in Europe operated under General Pershing’s command and the AEF became an independent army in August 1918. It was an important piece of US strategy that a separate American force operate in France, as the purpose of the US Army was to defeat the German army. The Allies repeatedly sought to amalgamate US forces, especially when their manpower reserves ran low and German armies drove them back. General Pershing, in accordance with his instructions from Baker on May 27th, consistently resisted wholesale amalgamation.

### Chapter Conclusions

US wartime policy during the First World War was largely an outgrowth of Wilson’s experiences dealing with both the Allies and Central Powers. Prior to April 1917, the US had seen that the Allies were in many ways fighting over territorial disputes and hegemonies that had little impact to the people in America. Allied actions at sea caused direct confrontation with the US, although these issues were largely mitigated by the heavy trade imbalance in the Allies favor. Similarly, the US decision to declare war on Germany was a direct result of that nation’s actions in Europe, the US homeland, and attempts to stop the flow of goods across the Atlantic. Although USW was likely to bring the US into the war on the side of the Allies, the American threat was acceptable given the swift victory USW offered. Germany was not worried about a US declaration of war

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<sup>180</sup> Pershing, 1:38; Harbord, 66.

given the size of the US army and the shipping necessary to maintain a large force so far from the US homeland. Due to the German actions, the US entered the war squarely against her, but not in favor of the Allied politics. US policy was designed to give Wilson a freer hand at the peace table by remaining an associate power, while also concentrating US effort against Germany.

The US wartime strategy was created given the policy President Wilson set forth in his address to Congress on April 2, 1917. Centered around three points, the strategy first focused on sending a force to Europe as quickly as possible. Charged with bolstering Allied morale through a show of support, General Pershing's nascent AEF also created the logistical backbone to support a larger force. While Pershing laid the groundwork in Europe, in the US the War Department, enabled by the Selective Service Act, created the manpower pool for Pershing to use to defeat the German forces on the western front. Finally, the AEF was intended as an independent army in France, fighting alongside the forces of Britain and France but not subservient to them. This independence was vital to ensuring US interests and achieving policy goals during the war and peace.

After the arrival of US forces in Europe, it was largely up to Pershing to oversee the coordination of US actions within Allied strategy. His focus for the remainder of 1917 was the formation of a logistical base to support the millions of troops being trained in the US. By the end of 1917, the looming German threat and Allied weakness forced a major re-evaluation of Allied strategy. Bliss was dispatched to Europe to assist and help Pershing determine how the Allied strategy would accommodate the burgeoning American presence. The US and Allies had to address their respective strategies and find ways to coordinate, balance, and ultimately execute a combined plan for 1918.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE STRATEGIC MELTING POT

The tide of American forces in France, which was ultimately to swell to so large a flood, mounted only in a dribbling fashion during those early months. . . Yet this flow, so tardy for the time being, was watched with concentrated interest by friend and foe alike, and became the dominating strategic factor in the calculations of both sides.<sup>181</sup>

— David Lloyd George

During the final months of 1917 the Allies were faced with several challenges that forced them to approach 1918 differently from the previous years of the war. By the end of 1917, Russia was beset by internal strife due to the Bolshevik Revolution, Italian forces had nearly been destroyed at Caporetto, and both Britain and France were facing severe manpower shortages due to the three-year long war of attrition. The expected exit of the Russian armies opened the nightmare scenario that the Allies had dreaded since the start of the war; namely that if Russia signed a separate peace, the Germans would concentrate in the west in overwhelming numbers. Throughout this period, the influence of the US was growing as American forces slowly flowed to Europe. Although US leadership was actively engaged in both political and military matters during this time, there was little US influence on the overall Allied strategic decision making.

This chapter analyzes the US influences on Allied strategic decision making as it evolved between June 1917 and March 1918. The Allies were again forced to create, balance, and execute a cohesive strategy to combat the expected German onslaught. Edward House, General Bliss, and General Pershing represented American interests

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<sup>181</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs 1917-1918*, 369.

throughout this time and sought to influence their European partners towards US policies and objectives. However, the Allies avoided the American pressures and were able to create a plan for 1918 that was little influenced by their partners.

### Strategy for 1918: A Product of Crisis and Response

The events of 1917 heavily shaped both the Allied strategy for 1918 and the way they coordinated their efforts for the rest of the war. The Allies were in steady decline throughout 1917, and their failures put increasing pressure on them to better coordinate their efforts and unify their military strategy. Ultimately, the Allied failures placed them at the mercy of the slowly arriving American forces, armies which were untested and unformed. When creating a strategy for 1918, some, like Marshall Ferdinand Foch, foresaw the Allied dependency on American manpower sooner than others. By the time of the Italian defeat (early November 1917), it was clear the Allies needed a better way to coordinate their efforts, giving birth to the Supreme War Council. Once in session, the SWC dedicated its first efforts in unifying the Allied strategy for 1918. Ultimately it came to the same conclusion that Foch had foreseen as early as July 1917. Throughout these episodes, the Americans attempted to influence the Allies towards their policies and strategies, with varying levels of success. The greatest effect the US had on the Allies creation and coordination of strategy was the timetable and number of arriving American forces. The individual actions and efforts made by the Americans during this time period paled in comparison to the original decision President Wilson made in April 1917 when he decided to send a large American Expeditionary Force to France.

### A Prophetic Strategy

The Allies met in Paris on from July 25-26, 1917 to discuss the recent failure of the Kerensky Offensive. The failure of the Russian offensive and the inherent weakness of the Russian Provisional Government drove the Allies to re-evaluate their strategy for 1917. Generals Luigi Cadorna, Sir William Robertson, Philippe Pétain, Pershing, and Foch met on the 26th and came to the conclusion that the collapse of the Russian armies required a reevaluation of the Allied political, economic, and morale standing.<sup>182</sup> The following day Foch submitted a memorandum that focused the Allies on their dependence on US manpower, stating, “the Coalition ought to be able to assemble the resources necessary to resist the enemy’s onslaught until such moment as America can put in line enough troops to re-establish the balance to our advantage.”<sup>183</sup> He continued to outline four actions necessary for Allied success:

(a) Confine ourselves to the simple defense of secondary fronts, and reduce the effectiveness on these fronts to a minimum consistent with this defensive attitude.

(b) Hasten in every possible way the creation of an American Army and its transport to France.

(c) Prepare the tonnage necessary for moving the forces to be taken from the secondary fronts.

(d) Obtain unity of action on the Western Front by means of a permanent inter-Allied military organ, whose function would be to prepare the rapid movement of troops from one theatre to another.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>183</sup> Ferdinand Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, trans. T. Bentley Mott (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1931), 256.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 257.

The strategy that Foch put forth in July 1917 was prophetic for many reasons. First, it demonstrated an early appreciation that the Allies were dependent on the US for the manpower necessary for success. As will be discussed later, it also proved to be highly accurate given the eventual strategy the Allies would agree to. On both points, his memorandum of July 1917 supports the conclusion that the expected presence of a large US force in France was the dominating strategic factor for the Allies. The other aspects of the US policy and strategy were minor compared to this fact.

#### The “Permanent Inter-Allied Military Organ”

The Supreme War Council was created in November 1917 as a permanent decision making body focused on creating and unifying Allied policy and strategy. Although the idea for a standing council of Allied decision making had been thought of earlier, it was not until late in 1917 that the impetus to create one existed. The Italian defeat at Caporetto and the concern of Italy falling out of the war spurred David Lloyd George, the British prime minister at the time, to finally bring the Allies together to form the council.

The US had a dubious role during the formation of the SWC. The US desire to remain distant from Allied politics and join the war as an associate affected American interests on the council. When Lloyd George proposed the council, he saw it as a means to unify Allied action, downplay the influence of the British military leadership, and above all create a political establishment to oversee the entirety of the Allied war effort.<sup>185</sup> In his memoirs, Lloyd George railed against the lack of a unified Allied strategy

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<sup>185</sup> Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 25-27.

and the military leaders who had each fought for their own national desires. In his mind, the SWC was supposed to take the decision making away from the generals and place it in a political body that could consider every aspect of the war to ensure victory. In his words:

The real weakness of Allied strategy was that it never existed. Instead of one great war with a united front, there were at least six separate and distinct wars with a separate, distinct and independent strategy for each. . . There was no real unity of conception, co-ordination of effort or pooling of resources in such a way as to deal the enemy the hardest knocks at his weakest point. There were so many national armies, each with its own strategy and its own resources to carry it through. Neither in men, guns or ammunition was there any notion of distributing them in such a way as to produce the greatest results with the available resources of the Alliance as a whole. There had been no genuine endeavor to pool brains with a view to surveying the whole vast battlefield and to deciding where and how the most effective blows could be struck at the enemy. . . The two-day conferences of great generals which were held late each autumn to determine the campaign for the ensuing year, were an elaborate handshaking reunion. They had all of them come to the meeting with their plans in their pockets. There was nothing to discuss. It was essential that a body should be set up for common thinking for the next campaign.<sup>186</sup>

As he worked to create a political body he was be challenged by the American desire to keep politics out of Allied military decision making. Ultimately the US desires were checked and the council continued along the lines that Lloyd George envisioned for it.

The founding meeting of the SWC was held on November 7, 1917 at Rapallo, Italy. Conspicuously absent from this first meeting was any US representation.<sup>187</sup> Lloyd

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<sup>186</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, 4: 2347-2348.

<sup>187</sup> Proces-Verbal of a Conference of the British, French, and Italian Governments held at the "New Casino Hotel." Rapallo, on Wednesday, November 7, 1917, 1; Records of the American Section of the Supreme War Council, 1917-1919, National Archives Microfilm Publication M923, roll 21.

George approached Pershing on November 4th about attending the meeting, but Pershing declined because in his view, “the advice of war councils was not usually of any great value.”<sup>188</sup> He did see the value of the Allies meeting regularly, but felt that military direction was the best way to do this. Lloyd George wanted to unify all Allied action through political leadership, whereas Pershing, indicative of a larger American sentiment towards the war, wanted to unify Allied military action through military leadership. This makes sense given President Wilson’s position towards prosecuting the war; he wanted to unify Allied military action in order to keep the US separate from Allied politics. As such, Pershing declined to attend the first session of the SWC, in accordance with US policy.<sup>189</sup>

At Rapallo, the Council’s membership was set as the “Prime Minister or a Member of Government” along with “one permanent military representative” as a “technical advisor.”<sup>190</sup> This arrangement made the SWC primarily a political body first and a military body second. While the Rapallo meeting was being held, an American Mission to Europe led by Edward House was landing in England to better coordinate the American war effort with the Allies.<sup>191</sup> Lloyd George took advantage of House’s presence in Europe to push for American support for the SWC. General Bliss arrived with House, and both men were dubious of the political organization proposed for the

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<sup>188</sup> Pershing, 1:214.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Proces-Verbal of a Conference of the British, French, and Italian Governments held at the “New Casino Hotel.” Rapallo, on Wednesday, November 7, 1917, 3.

<sup>191</sup> House, 3: 260.

SWC. Like Pershing, they preferred a body to unify Allied military actions. In his messages back to President Wilson, House recommended that there be no sitting US political member on the SWC, and that Bliss serve as the US military representative.<sup>192</sup> Although the President publicly supported the SWC as a mechanism to unify the Allies, he gave House the latitude to pursue American involvement within the council as he saw fit.<sup>193</sup> As will be seen, the Americans took actions to change the SWC more towards their liking, but failed.

The makeup of the SWC was highly contentious in both Britain and France once word of the Rapallo agreement became public. In Britain, the military establishment represented by Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Robertson, and supported by General Douglas Haig, objected to Lloyd George appointing General Henry Wilson as the British military representative to the SWC.<sup>194</sup> Robertson and Haig had poor relationships with the prime minister and General Wilson was seen as a tool to circumvent their control over British military decisions.<sup>195</sup> After Rapallo, Lloyd George was faced with a parliamentary crisis over the apparent submission of British forces to a foreign command.<sup>196</sup> Ultimately he was able to skillfully avoid the challenges to his

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 3:224.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 3:224-225.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 3:221.

<sup>195</sup> Lloyd George is quoted as saying the SWC was, “an ingenious device for depriving Robertson of his power.” in French, 164.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 166.

authority as British prime minister.<sup>197</sup> In France, Prime Minister Paul Painlevé was also faced with parliamentary crisis that was exacerbated by the Rapallo agreement.<sup>198</sup> Unable to overcome opposition to his government, Painlevé resigned on November 13th and was replaced by Georges Clemenceau.<sup>199</sup>

The primary disagreement in both Britain and France over the creation of the SWC was the command relationships it appeared to support. The argument centered on the issue of an Allied commander, with the French heavily in favor of it (assuming it was a Frenchman) while the British refused to submit to a foreign commander. The Americans supported the French position, and once House arrived in France he met with both Petain and Clemenceau to discuss an alternative to the Rapallo agreement. The Americans proposed an arrangement where unity of control for all Allied forces would be vested under a President of the Supreme War Council, who would be supported by the Chiefs of Staff of the different national armies.<sup>200</sup> Both Petain and Clemenceau approved the American proposition, but when it was presented to Lloyd George later that month he flatly rejected it on the grounds that the British people would not accept their troops serving under a foreign commander, nor could he trust Robertson (the British CIGS) on the council. Finally, Lloyd George was adamant that the SWC should be a political body

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 167-169.

<sup>198</sup> David S. Newhall, *Clemenceau: A Life at War* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1991), 336-337.

<sup>199</sup> House, 3:220-221.

<sup>200</sup> See “Memorandum on Unity of Control” Paris, November 25, 1917 reprinted in House, 3:259.

and not a military one, as its members needed the executive authority to prosecute the entire war effort from a political, economic, and military standpoint. In his opinion, unified military command had been tried before and failed because the generals failed to get along, and there was no agreement on policy between them.<sup>201</sup> The SWC was meant to solve these problems. Lloyd George ultimately got his way by threatening to head back to London if the Americans and French did not agree to his scheme.<sup>202</sup>

When the second meeting of the SWC was held on December 1st, the arrangement agreed to at Rapallo held. The American and French attempts to mold the council into a unifying body for military decision making had failed in the face of British resistance. Therefore, the effects that the US had on the formation of the final Allied decision making body were minor. The US representatives, whether diplomatic or military, had all made it clear they approved of a more unified body to coordinate military action. For all of their actions and planning, their efforts failed in November and December 1917 to influence the organization of the Allied council.

### The Plan for 1918

The first task for the Supreme War Council was the creation and approval of a unified plan for 1918. The second meeting of the SWC duly assigned the task to the military representatives, and by the third meeting (January 30–February 2, 1918) they presented the council with Joint Note 12, “1918 Campaign”.<sup>203</sup> The plan called for a

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<sup>201</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, 4:2409.

<sup>202</sup> House, 3:266-267.

<sup>203</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Second Session of the Supreme War Council, held at the Trianon Palace, Versailles, on Saturday, December 1, 1917, 7; Records of the American

strategic defensive in the west during 1918 and an offensive against the Ottomans while they awaited the arrival of additional American forces.<sup>204</sup> Only one US division was in line during the winter of 1917/1918 and it was not certain when more would be ready. Although the US had been in the war for seven months, its military power was not yet felt, and the Allies did not expect it to come into play until 1919. They therefore planned for fight for much of 1918 without the Americans.

The biggest US influence was the mere presence of American forces in France and the nation's commitment to send more. Other than this, there was almost no US effect on the Allied strategy. When the initial strategy proposed at the SWC called for an effort against the Ottomans, the US representatives at the SWC made little effort to influence the Allied plans. The US saw France as the decisive theater of operations, and did not support efforts elsewhere that weakened the main theater. Ultimately it was the French, not the Americans, who forced the Allies towards a strategy focused western front for 1918.

The British were interested in diverting Allied forces against the Ottomans in large part due to Lloyd George's influence.<sup>205</sup> According to Joint Note 12, there was no way enough American forces were available to enable a decisive offensive on the western

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Section of the Supreme War Council, 1917-1919, National Archives Microfilm Publication M923, roll 21.

<sup>204</sup> Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 169-172.

<sup>205</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Six Meetings of the Third Session of the Supreme War Council, held in the Council Chamber, Trianon-Palace, Versailles, January 30-February 2, 1918, 12; Records of the American Section of the Supreme War Council, 1917-1919, National Archives Microfilm Publication M923, roll 21.

front in 1918, and the most opportunity lie in an offensive against the Ottomans. An attack there would not only lead to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, but would “enable the Allies to get into direct touch with, and give effective help to, such elements of resistance to German domination as may still exist in Roumania and Southern Russia.”<sup>206</sup> In effect, knocking out the Ottomans was a double win for the Allies; it removed a member of the Central Powers and offered hope to keep the eastern front alive. Given the British successes in 1917 against the Ottomans in Mesopotamia, they believed additional forces would finish them off. Clemenceau skillfully removed the Allied operation against the Ottomans and limited it to a British-only affair with the following resolution during the third session of the SWC:

The Supreme War Council accepts Note 12 of the Military Representatives on the Plan of ‘Campaign for 1918’, the British Government having made it clear that, in utilising [sic] in the most effective fashion the forces already at its disposal in the Eastern theatre it has no intention of diverting forces from the Western front or in any way relaxing its efforts to maintain the safety of that front, which it regards as a vital interest of the whole Alliance.<sup>207</sup>

During the discussion concerning the Ottomans, General Bliss (the only American present that was appointed, and then only as military representative) was conspicuously quiet. When House was present for the December session, he and Bliss agreed to limit their involvement in the council’s military discussions. In House’s words:

General Bliss and I agreed not to take any positive position, but to listen and get information. We feel that it is not in good taste to do more at this time, since we have no men on the firing line. When our army is here in numbers, then it will be another story. Questions of general policy, finance, munitions, and all economic

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<sup>206</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs 1917-1918*, 225.

<sup>207</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Six Meetings of the Third Session of the Supreme War Council, held in the Council Chamber, Trianon-Palace, Versailles, January 30-February 2, 1918, 25.

problems we feel at liberty to take an active part in, but as to military plans, other than naval, it seems best to remain in the background and listen.<sup>208</sup>

In effect, the Americans at the SWC declined to take a position on military matters. It is important to understand this point because it explains why Bliss did not object to a plan that was so clearly against US interests. Perhaps he understood the French position before the discussion, and knew they would fight to keep the Allies focused on the west, or perhaps he was just honoring his agreement with House. Either way, he did nothing to attempt to influence the SWC on this issue. The French resolution ultimately kept the Allied plan in line with US policy.

The defining assumption of the Allied strategy was the arrival of the Americans. Whether it was Lloyd George, calling the arrival of US forces the, “dominating strategic factor,” or Petain summing up his strategy with, “We must wait for the Americans,” it was clear that the Allies were unable to take to the strategic offensive in France without the manpower offered by the US.<sup>209</sup> As the third meeting of the SWC closed, Bliss wrote to Secretary of War Baker back in Washington that the Allies, “openly state that their hope is in the man-power of the United States.”<sup>210</sup> All parties recognized this as fact, and created a strategy around maintaining their positions while awaiting American reinforcements. This was the largest effect that the US entry into the First World War had on the Allied strategy for 1918. Beyond this, there was little need or ability for the US to influence their Allied partners.

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<sup>208</sup> House, 3:276.

<sup>209</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs 1917-1918*, 369; Barnett, 239.

<sup>210</sup> Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 79.

It would be convenient to state that the final unifying body of Allied strategy making was created out of the US entry into the First World War, but this is clearly not the case. Once the SWC was in session, it would also be easy to assume that the Americans played a defining role in crafting the strategy for 1918 that it produced. Neither of these statements are true. Although the US attempted to influence the creation of the SWC, that body remained a political instrument despite American objections. The US representatives at the SWC were conspicuously quiet during the early council sessions, unable and unwilling to influence Allied decisions. Ultimately the largest impact the US had on this process was tying Allied strategy to the buildup of American forces in France. Foch was one of the first to recognize this fact, identifying the buildup of American forces as vital as early as July 1917. Nearly every Allied leader recognized this weakness by the end of 1917, and believed that US manpower was the solution to their problems. Until US forces were present in France in enough numbers to permit a strategic offensive, the Allies planned to await the coming German attack.

### The Balancing Act of 1918

The balancing act that the Allies and the US had to achieve during the winter of 1917 and 1918 was mainly focused around the employment of American forces. Amalgamation again returned as all parties attempted to come to an agreement on how American forces would be used and where the Americans would be sent. The solutions to these arguments ultimately became the foundation for the AEF and had ramifications for all parties once conflict resumed in the west in March 1918. Ultimately the Allies and Americans were dependent on each other; the former for US manpower and the latter for British shipping to get it to Europe. They came to tentative agreements during this time as

they sought to balance these needs, leading towards a precarious balance that was tested during the months of difficult combat that followed.

### The Six Division Plan

Throughout the winter of 1917 and 1918 the British, French, and Americans began to work through their differences concerning amalgamation. Prior to the fall of 1917, there was much talk from the Allies about amalgamating US troops, but it was not until the winter that serious discussion arose. Through their large merchant marine, the British had the ability to bring over large numbers of US troops, but up to this point they had resisted calls from the Americans to do so. In fact, the issue of using British shipping to bring over American troops was discussed repeatedly between Pershing, Robertson and Lloyd George. Pershing's requests in June, September, and twice in November 1917 for British shipping were all denied.<sup>211</sup> Bliss was also convinced that the British had additional shipping available but were unwilling to provide it to the Americans.<sup>212</sup> The British were denying the US requests because they themselves were short of shipping for their own needs. Lloyd George met with House on his mission to Europe in November 1917, and passionately explained, saying:

Now, we are a country more dependent upon imports than probably any other great country in the world. . . . We only grow about one-fifth of the wheat we consume. We are dependent on what we get from overseas for the rest. Taking the barest essentials not merely of life, but of war, we have also to import a good deal of our ore and other commodities, essential to our war equipment. Our exports have almost vanished, except war exports. I should like our American friends to realise [sic] what this means to us. . . . We manufactured for the world, and we carried for the world, and we did a good deal of financing for the world; all that is

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<sup>211</sup> Pershing, 1: 52, 1:54, 1:171, 1:241-242; House, 3:249.

<sup>212</sup> Palmer, 208.

practically gone. We have stripped to the waist for war [emphasis original]. . . . We have had to get rid of our business, because we want it for war, and to help not merely ourselves, but to help our Allies. I am not sure it is sufficiently realised [sic] outside – the extent to which we have put our trade, as it were, into the War. We have risked it all on this great venture.<sup>213</sup>

US leadership found it understandably distressing in late December when the British approached them about providing shipping in exchange for American battalions to train with the British Expeditionary Force.<sup>214</sup> Known as the “150 Battalion Plan,” it came about through a series of communiques between Lloyd George, House, Pershing, Haig, and Robertson. The plan centered around sending 150 battalions of relatively untrained US infantry to the British who would train them in return for their use in quiet sectors and during emergencies. These doughboys would temporarily reinforce the reduced British divisions in France while offering additional shipping and training to support the buildup of the AEF.<sup>215</sup>

The Americans were naturally suspect of the sudden availability of British shipping. President Wilson wondered if the British would keep their promise to ship the battalions.<sup>216</sup> Indeed, the British request amounted to approximately 150,000 men.<sup>217</sup> This amount conveniently covered the British shortfall in manpower, which Lloyd

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<sup>213</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs 1917-1918*, 402-403.

<sup>214</sup> Pershing, 1:289.

<sup>215</sup> Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 133-134.

<sup>216</sup> Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 76.

<sup>217</sup> Palmer, 216.

George notes was 116,000 men as of December 1917.<sup>218</sup> Pershing wrote a letter to Baker in mid-January explaining the downsides of the plan, namely that it dissipated US manpower, was not certain that the forces would ever be returned to the AEF, and that temporary amalgamation was only acceptable in an emergency.<sup>219</sup> Beyond these arguments amalgamation effected the training US forces received, and would slow down the creation of a separate American army.

The episode continued through the third session of the Supreme War Council, when amalgamation was brought up by the British and French.<sup>220</sup> Bliss used this session to clearly state that the US policy was against permanent amalgamation, and would except it only temporarily. He also pointed out that, “permanent amalgamation of our units with British and French units would be intolerable to American sentiment.”<sup>221</sup> Known as the “Six Division Plan,” the solution to amalgamation at the end of January 1918 was for the British to bring over six divisions to be trained by them while the bulk of the US forces were to train with the French. The training with the British and French armies included time in the line in quiet sectors, thus freeing up more seasoned troops for

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<sup>218</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs 1917-1918*, 5.

<sup>219</sup> Pershing, 1:295

<sup>220</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Six Meetings of the Third Session of the Supreme War Council, held in the Council Chamber, Trianon-Palace, Versailles, January 30-February 2, 1918, 6-7.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

use elsewhere.<sup>222</sup> For both countries, those US forces training with them were available for combat in an emergency, but not for the duration of the war. Pershing made it clear in a letter to Baker on January 17th that he expected the units back, stating, “we must insist upon our men being returned when called for, or at least when we get of the remainder of the organizations from which they may be taken.”<sup>223</sup>

The Amalgamation controversy did not end at this point in the war, but the episode was largely closed from now until the beginning of the German offensive in March. This episode illustrates that when it came to issues of national importance, the US was able to hold its ground against the influences of the Allies. The US policy required that American forces fight independently in France, and permanent amalgamation defeated this purpose. It is important to note that this did not change the Allied strategy. When the Allied determined they had to stand on the defensive and wait for the arrival of American forces until 1919, they did not dictate how the arriving Americans would serve. Therefore, the ability of the Americans to maintain their position in the face of Allied requests otherwise did not influence Allied strategic decision making. The primacy of American manpower also failed to tilt the balance in the US-Allied relationship. The Americans were just as reliant on the Allies for logistical and training support as the Allies were on US manpower. During negotiations at the SWC neither side held serious sway over the other. Thus, the Allies and US were able to balance their objectives, with

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<sup>222</sup> For the French agreement, see Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 155-157; For the Final Six Division Program, it is reprinted in both Pershing, 1:309-310 and Lloyd George, *War Memoirs 1917-1918*, 419-420.

<sup>223</sup> Pershing, 1:295.

Britain and France gaining additional US manpower along their fronts, albeit temporarily, while the US gained access to additional British shipping. Neither side was happy with these arrangements, but they suited everyone for the time being. Therefore, the US presence did not affect the Allies' ability to balance their strategic decisions within the needs of the coalition.

### Disposition of Forces

The Allies and US attempted to influence each other as they planned for the use of American forces across Europe. During the winter of 1917 and 1918 the Allies tried repeatedly to get the US to send forces to Russia. However, such a diversion of forces was against the US policy of focusing on the war in France. Similarly, it was vital that the future front of the AEF be worked out between the partners. In both instances the US was able to come to agreements with the Allies that aligned with US policy, although in the case of Russia only temporarily. Once the campaigns of 1918 started, the US was challenged to carry through with both in the face of Allied pressures.

The steady decline of the Russian state and military during 1917 was a continuous concern for the Allies. As early as July 25th at an Inter-Allied Conference in Paris the Allies were discussing the implications and their plans to counter Russia's exit from the war.<sup>224</sup> With the Bolshevik Revolution in November and subsequent ceasefire with Germany in December, it seemed certain that organized resistance to the Central Powers on the eastern front would crumble without Allied assistance. Both the British and French were supportive of efforts to bolster resistance to the Germans in the east, but the

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<sup>224</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs 1917-1918*, 91-93.

Americans were not. It was only in December that the US declared war on Austria-Hungary because it was a “vassal of the German Government” but not on the Ottomans or Bulgaria since they were only “tools of Germany” and did “not yet stand in the direct path of [US] necessary action.”<sup>225</sup> Although the US was beginning to look at Germany’s eastern partners, US policy was still squarely focused on defeating Germany. Wilson’s goals demanded a defeat of Germany in the west, and as such the Americans were never very supportive of sending forces elsewhere.

The US determination to focus solely on the western front was contrasted by the Allied interest of fixing German forces in the east. Even before the war erupted, the nations in the west were worried about the possibility of Germany concentrating her forces against France, and in the winter of 1917 the Allies were faced with this very real possibility. In early December 1917, the British War Cabinet approved a resolution that requested US and Japanese forces to land at Vladivostok in order to safeguard the Siberian Railway.<sup>226</sup> On January 8, the French also reached out through their ambassador in America with a similar proposal for US intervention in Siberia.<sup>227</sup> US Secretary of State Robert Lansing declined the French offer on January 16th on the grounds that it

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<sup>225</sup> Wilson, 451.

<sup>226</sup> War Cabinet Papers (227-308 Inclusive), September 3rd, 1917 to December 31st, 1917, 480, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-23-4.pdf>.

<sup>227</sup> United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relation of the United States, 1918 Russia Volume II* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1918), 20-21.

was, “likely to offend those Russians who are now in sympathy with the aims and desires which the United States and its cobelligerents have at heart in making war.”<sup>228</sup>

With the US reluctant to support the Vladivostok expedition, the Allies changed their tactics and looked for the US to support a Japanese-only force in the far east. The issue came before the Supreme War Council, and it approved Joint Note 16 on the subject in February. The note, which was drafted by Bliss, effectively gave the Allies what they wanted with an Allied-sanctioned Japanese force to intervene in Russia.<sup>229</sup> Bliss was forced to walk back from his initial support for Joint Note 18 in March based on direction from his superiors in Washington. Fears about a Japanese intervention forcing the Russians into the German’s camp and Japanese expansionist aims in the Far East eliminated US support for Joint Note 16. In a letter to the president on March 3rd, Edward House was quick to advise him that, “We are treading upon exceedingly delicate and dangerous ground, and are likely to lose that fine moral position you have given the Entente cause. The whole structure which you have built up so carefully may be destroyed over-night, and our position will be no better than the Germans.”<sup>230</sup> President Wilson sent a note to the Japanese on March 3rd rejecting the logic of sending Japanese troops into Siberia. He cautioned the Japanese that if they did intervene they should do so as “an ally of Russia” otherwise they ran the risk of doing “exactly what Germany is

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>229</sup> United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Lansing papers, 1914–1920; Volume II* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939), 451.

<sup>230</sup> House, 3:406.

doing in the West.”<sup>231</sup> The Japanese reply on March 19th was reassuring to the Americans, noting that it was Japan’s, “intention to refrain from taking any action on which due understanding has not been reached between the United States and the other great powers of the Entente.”<sup>232</sup> The US had succeeded in blocking Allied intentions in the far east. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the US was challenged to maintain the status quo concerning an expedition to Russia in the face of the spring crisis and growing Allied pressures.

This episode illustrates that the US was not willing to assist the Allies if their plans ran counter to US interests. Not only was an expedition to the east against the US’s primary goal of focusing on the war in France, it was vital that Wilson maintain his high moral ground to influence the future peace talks, and sending a troop of Americans or condoning a Japanese incursion was against this political end. The US was also wary of Japanese expansion against a weakened Russia; the combination of these concerns ensured stiff opposition to the Allied requests. The Allies also realized that without US support they would have difficulty achieving their objectives. House wrote in December 1917 when he refused a British plan that, “This threw the resolution into the ‘scrap-heap’ because every one there knew that without the support of the United States it would be less than useless.”<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Department of State, *Foreign Relations, Russia, Vol II*, 67.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>233</sup> House, 3:290.

When it came to Russia, the US and the Allies had diverging interests. On the subject of where the AEF would be formed, their interests were better aligned. Logistics and national interests converged to present a workable solution for both parties during the summer of 1917 that provided the necessary ground to grow the nascent American forces into subsequent corps and armies. This was one of the few areas during this time that the aims of the great powers meshed relatively seamlessly.

The British and French were faced with serious national considerations on the western front given the locations of their forces. The British were committed to defending the ports along the English Channel to protect the source of their supplies on the continent. The French, on the other hand, were committed to defending Paris and all that it represented. Beyond the issues of “national obligations,” as Pershing put it in his memoirs, was one of logistics.<sup>234</sup> The ports and transportation along the Channel were already at capacity supporting the British. The same was true behind the French front on towards Paris. These issues logically pushed the location for the AEF towards the south-eastern end of the western front. In June 1917 Pershing and Petain decided upon a tentative theater for the American forces centered on Lorraine, near Verdun or Nancy and including the St. Mihiel salient.<sup>235</sup>

This agreement was largely a non-issue at this time for the Allies and US. It is a rare case where each of their interests could be accommodated by an agreement backed

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<sup>234</sup> Pershing, 1:83.

<sup>235</sup> Pershing discusses the pros and cons to the various areas considered for the AEF along with the various interests of the Allied parties in his memoirs, see Pershing, 1:79-86.

by logistical considerations. The agreement in June between Petain and Pershing was only tentative, but it let the nascent American forces in France begin building up their sources of supply and lines of communications for the millions of US troops being trained in America.

The Allies and Americans had difficulties reconciling their differences concerning intervention in Russia. Where Allied interests directly contradicted those of the United States, the Americans held firm. During the early parts of 1918 the Allied plans to intervene in Russia were consistently resisted and ultimately came to naught. The pressure to send forces to the far east continued, but at least during this crucial period the US goals of focusing on France and maintaining a position of power for the peace table succeeded. This issue is contrasted with the relative ease that the French and Americans decided on a tentative location for the AEF. This instance illustrates that when their desires did not conflict, the US and the Allies were able to come to a decision with minimal strife. Like the Russian issue, this too came up again later in 1918, once it was time to form American corps and armies. For now, though, the issue was settled and other issues took center stage. This further reinforces the point that the US did not unduly influence Allied strategic decision making. In both cases the Allies and Americans worked through their differences, with neither proving dominant over the other.

### The Issues of Command

The Americans were highly motivated to unify the actions of the Allies. They assumed that many of the Allied failures on the western front were due to a failure of the Allies to work together. Certainly, the two senior American generals in France held this opinion, as Pershing stated, "I often remarked that the Allies would never win the war

until they secured unity of action under some form of coordinated control.”<sup>236</sup> Likewise Bliss argued, “national temperament must be put aside in favor of this unified control, even going if necessary (as I believe it is) to the limit of unified command. Otherwise, our dead and theirs may have died in vain.”<sup>237</sup> Even House recognized that the Allies were splintered and, “If this war is to be won, better team work between the Allies must be effected. As now conducted there is great loss of energy and resources.”<sup>238</sup> It has already been discussed how the American effort to steer the SWC towards greater military unity failed. Another opportunity presented itself for the Americans to press the Europeans for unity during the early sessions at the Supreme War Council when the Allies wrestled with creating an interallied reserve.

Foch proposed a plan for an Interallied General Reserve at the third session of the SWC in late January 1918. Created jointly by him and General Wilson, the plan called for the creation of a multinational force with significant strength to respond to any emergency on the western front in the event of a large German offensive. Foch, ever famous for his enthusiasm for the offensive, remarked during the early battles in France, “My right is driven in, my centre is giving way, the situation is excellent, I attack.”<sup>239</sup> This same offensive spirit shown through in his plans for the General Reserve, noting, “we have only prepared palliatives to meet the enemy’s offensive; we have no ample,

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<sup>236</sup> Pershing, 1:34.

<sup>237</sup> Palmer, 206.

<sup>238</sup> House, 3:308-309.

<sup>239</sup> Gilbert, 74.

vigorous counter-stroke ready.”<sup>240</sup> In his mind it was just as important to plan the transition from the defensive to the offensive, and a strong counter-attacking force naturally fit that requirement. In a meeting with Haig, Robertson, Petain, and Pershing in late January, Foch stated,

The German offensive at Verdun was stopped not by our resistance there but by our offensive on the Somme. Such an operation is possible only when foreseen and prepared beforehand. In planning for the counteroffensive, I think, that the entire front must be considered as a whole and not the French as one part and the British as another. The plan must envisage them together preparing for offensive action on a common battlefield with all the forces at their disposal.<sup>241</sup>

The plan for the general reserve that Foch proposed at the SWC on January 30th was meant to serve this purpose.<sup>242</sup> In general, the plan called for a mixed force of Allied divisions to be placed under a separate commander that would have direction for the defending forces. If the Germans launched an all-out assault, the general reserve would counter-attack and stop it.

Bliss was quick to voice his support for the plan even as Haig, Robertson, and Petain came down against the general reserve.<sup>243</sup> It was logical for Bliss to support the scheme, as it offered a chance at greater unity but did not necessarily guarantee British opposition on the grounds of submitting their forces under a foreign commander-in-chief. Instead, the general reserve was led by an Execute War Board composed of the same

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<sup>240</sup> Foch, 275.

<sup>241</sup> Pershing, 1:301.

<sup>242</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Six Meetings of the Third Session of the Supreme War Council, held in the Council Chamber, Trianon-Palace, Versailles, January 30-February 2, 1918, 4.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 5-7.

military representatives that served on the SWC. Since the board in some ways had executive powers (such as the direction of military forces), Lloyd George suggested that the board have a president.<sup>244</sup> Once that was agreed to, Foch was nominated to the position. He was charged to work with the other generals to determine the strength of the general reserve, where it would be located, arrangements for its transportation, decide how and when to employ it, and, if possible, determine when it would become a counter-offensive under the control of one of the national commanders-in-chiefs.<sup>245</sup>

This was the closest the Allies had come in creating a unified command up to this point, and it enjoyed consistent support from the Americans even as it drew mixed support from the Allies. In Britain, Lloyd George supported it in the face of resistance by Haig and Robertson. In France, Foch was obviously supportive of the plan and while Petain hedged his efforts by working both with and against the general reserve. The British and French commanders were generally against the general reserve because it circumvented some of their power and drew off forces from their commands.<sup>246</sup> Robertson was also against the general reserve, and the steps he took to torpedo the agreement lead to his removal as Chief of the General Staff.<sup>247</sup> The steps that Haig and Petain took to undermine the general reserve were subtler and ultimately more successful.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>246</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs 1917-1918*, 287.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 312.

Foch and those on the Executive War Board set about the tasks as directed by the SWC, concluding that 30 divisions were necessary for the General Reserve, comprised of nine to ten British, thirteen to fourteen French, and seven Italian divisions. The first hiccup came from Petain, who could only furnish eight divisions from France instead of the requested ten (four of the French divisions were supposed to come from those already in Italy).<sup>248</sup> The difference was reconciled between the Board and the French staff and was not a major issue. A larger problem came from Haig on March 2nd, when he wrote to Foch that none of the British divisions would be available because they had already been committed elsewhere.<sup>249</sup> The fate of the general reserve was decided at the fourth session of the Supreme War Council between March 14th and 15th in London. Haig stated his case and was supported by Clemenceau. The French Prime Minister had previously supported the general reserve, but was mollified by Haig's arguments and the fact that Haig and Petain had coordinated a separate scheme to support each other during the expected German offensive.<sup>250</sup> Their plan involved sending reinforcements to aid the other in the event of a German attack, but was limited to promises of support that neither was sure would arrive in their hour of need. Over those two days in March the work of Foch was dismantled and the reserve for all intents and purposes was eliminated. Without the forces to support it, it could not function. General Bliss was still in favor of the

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<sup>248</sup> Foch, 277.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>250</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Fourth Session of the Supreme War Council, held at 10, Downing Street, London, March 14-15, 1918, 4; Records of the American Section of the Supreme War Council, 1917-1919, National Archives Microfilm Publication M923, roll 21.

reserve and put forth various proposals to save it, but resistance from Haig, Petain, and Clemenceau was too much.<sup>251</sup>

The Interallied General Reserve was the closest the Allies came to a unified command up to that point, although it never actually existed in the field. It was important for many reasons, the most vital of which was that it put Foch in a position to become Commander-in-Chief of Allied Armies. It also demonstrated US resolve to pursue such a position, although unsuccessfully. Bliss wrote a report on December 18th where he noted:

Our Allies urge us to profit by their experience in three and a half years of war; to adopt the organization, the types of artillery, tanks, etc., that the test of war has proved to be satisfactory. We should go further. In making the great military effort now demanded of us we should demand as a prior condition that our Allies also profit by the experience of three and a half years of war in the matter of absolute unity of military control.<sup>252</sup>

As the US military advisor to the Supreme War Council, Bliss was not able to force the Allies to submit to his desires. The SWC paid lip service to the American demands with Resolution No. 1, which kept the reserve alive, albeit with limited forces and reliant on future US divisions for its principle makeup.<sup>253</sup> This instance is educational in demonstrating the US interest in a more unified command structure, but also showcased the US weakness in influencing the Allies. Despite the fact that nearly every US leader espoused the importance of unified military control, none were willing (or able) to use what influence the US had built up to get it.

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>252</sup> Palmer, 206.

<sup>253</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Fourth Session of the Supreme War Council, held at 10, Downing Street, London, March 14-15, 1918, L.C. 49.

## Chapter Conclusions

The events from November 1917 through the middle of March 1918 are enlightening for the purposes of this thesis. During this time, the Allies and US worked together to tackle problems of coordination, creation, and execution of a unified strategy. When it came to the coordination of strategy, the US was ultimately unable to convince the Allies to submit to their scheme for the Supreme War Council. When the original Allied plan for 1918 was not in concert with US objectives, their delegations sat silently by at the SWC and allowed the French to change it for them. When it came to balancing the employment of the AEF, the US was successful in staving off Allied attempts to amalgamate American forces into their armies. The plan was precarious, and conflict was bound to occur once the Allied armies were pressed with the German spring challenge. The US was successful in staving off Allied advances for an expedition into Russia, as well as working with the Allies to coordinate a tentative location for the future American Armies in France. When it came to the creation of a unified chain of command for Allied military action, the US heavily supported the Interallied General Reserve as a tool for this purpose. When faced with resistance from Haig, Petain, and Clemenceau concerning the General Reserve, the US was unable and unwilling to use its influence to save it.

These events lead to the conclusion that other than the presence of US forces and the commitment to create a large AEF, the US did not heavily influence Allied strategic decision making during this time. The influence of the US at the SWC, in guiding and creating unified strategy, and support for a unified command did not change the course the Allies chose to take. Although the US was very active during this time, they were

only able to affect the Allies on smaller issues, and these would turn out to be temporary after the German offensive.

## CHAPTER 5

### FROM CRISIS TO VICTORY

The enemy has hurled himself upon us in a supreme effort. He hopes to separate us from the English so as to open the way to Paris. Cost what it may he must be stopped. Hold your ground! Stand firm! Our (American) comrades are arriving. All together you will throw yourselves upon the invader. The battle is on. Soldiers of the Marne, of the Yser and of Verdun, I call upon you. The fate of France hangs in the balance.<sup>254</sup>

— General Philippe Petain

The final year of the Great War was punctuated with feelings of imminent defeat and victory for both the Allies and Central Powers. The Germans began a series of offensives on March 21, 1918 aimed at shattering the Allies and forcing a peace before the American armies could play a decisive role. When the German juggernaut ran out of steam in July, it was the Allies' turn to go on the attack, launching a series of offensives that pushed the Germans back through northern France and into Belgium and forced an armistice by the end of the year.

The greatest American effect on Allied strategy during the final year of the war was the arrival of US forces in significant numbers. The arriving American divisions enabled the Allies to weather the German storm and transition to the final offensive of the war. Other issues of strategic importance between the US and Allies were concluded during this time, most notably the issues of unified command, the amalgamation controversy, and the dispersion of forces outside of France. Although these secondary

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<sup>254</sup> Pershing, 1:356.

issues were important, the US effects from them were ultimately less impactful on Allied strategic decision making than the arrival of American forces.

This chapter analyzes the events from March through November of 1918, focusing on four primary areas: the creation of an Allied commander-in-chief, the final solution to the amalgamation controversy, the employment of American forces outside of France, and the impact of the arrival of US forces on the Allied war efforts. The analysis presented demonstrates that the US enabled the continuation of pre-existing Allied strategic decision making.

### Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies

The Allies took steps towards unifying their military command on the western front throughout the course of the war, but always stopped short of a supreme commander or generalissimo prior to the spring of 1918.<sup>255</sup> The efforts to place Nivelle in command over British forces during the Nivelle Offensive in 1917 and Foch's abortive plans for the Interallied General Reserve in early 1918 were the closest the Allies had come to implementing this important step. Neither proved successful at creating a generalissimo because the Allies were not yet able to overcome their inherent prejudices. Although Lloyd George supported a unified command during 1917, he was blocked by wishes of the British public and his generals in the field. Once the Americans were in the

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<sup>255</sup> During the First World War the Allies and Americans used the terms unified command, supreme commander, and generalissimo interchangeably. In modern terms, what they were attempting to implement would be a lead nation command structure, where one commander was appointed over the other national commanders. See Joint Publication 3-16 (July 16, 2013), chapter 2, section 4 for more information on lead nation command structures.

war, they tried to push the Allies towards a more unified military command, but had limited success. Where American insistence failed, the German spring offensive convinced the Allies. Therefore, the German attacks in March 1918 were the driving factor in the creation of an Allied commander-in-chief, not the US presence.

Ludendorff's plan for 1918 required a quick victory on the western front given the deteriorating economic and political situation within the members of the Central Powers and the impending arrival of increased American divisions.<sup>256</sup> His strategy centered on decisive engagements aimed at specific, yet vague, strategic goals. Codenamed "Michael" (March 21 - April 5), "Georgette" (April 9-29), "Blucher-Yorch" (May 27 - June 4), "Gneisenau" (June 9-12) and "Friedenssturm" (July 15-17), the Germans launched a series of attacks at multiple points along the western front. Most attacks were marked by tactical victory but achieved little of strategic value. As each operation failed to achieve its strategic ends, the Germans were forced relocate forces for another attack against a different section of the western front. To enable success, the Germans reorganized their forces and placed their strongest, most able bodied men into the attacking stormtrooper divisions. Combined with masterful artillery planning, they were tactically very successful, especially when compared to earlier attempts to break the stalemate of the trenches.

The Germans launched Operation Michael on March 21st against the British 3rd and 5th Armies, located at the junction between the French and British forces on the western front. The Germans chose this section of the front in the hopes of separating the

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<sup>256</sup> Ludendorff, 2: 543-544.

two Allied armies and because this section of front offered tactical success. Ludendorff believed that tactical results could achieve strategic collapse, and in his memoirs remarked:

If this blow succeeded the strategic result might indeed be enormous, as we should separate the bulk of the English Army from the French and crowd it up with its back to the sea.

I favoured the centre attack, but I was influenced by the time factor and by tactical considerations, first among them being the weakness of the enemy. Whether this weakness would continue I could not know. Tactics had to be considered before purely strategical objectives which it is futile to pursue unless tactical success is possible. A strategic plan which ignores the tactical factor is foredoomed to failure. Of this the Entente's attacks during the first three years of the war afford numerous examples.<sup>257</sup>

The Germans ultimately achieved an incredible local victory, pushing the Allies back along a 50-mile sector and occupying 1,200 square miles.<sup>258</sup> The German gains came at enormous cost, incurring 239,800 casualties while inflicting 254,739 on the Allies.<sup>259</sup> Because of the way the Germans had organized their attacking divisions, the casualties they took were from the units they could least afford to lose. Despite their apparent victory, the Germans were forced to continue to attack in the face of Allied resistance. Although they had achieved tactical successes, the strategic goal of separating the British and French was not achieved. Indeed, in the course of their defense the Allied armies grew closer, with the French coming to the aid of the British in order to re-establish their connection.

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 2:590-591.

<sup>258</sup> Stevenson, 67.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 68.

The initial Allied efforts to stop Michael centered on the plans for mutual support that Haig and Petain developed earlier in March. On the first day of the battle, French forces started their move to reinforce the beleaguered British. By the third day of the battle, Petain had sent nine infantry and five cavalry divisions to aid the British, despite fearing possible German attacks against the French in the Champagne sector.<sup>260</sup>

The crisis posed by Michael forced the Allies to address the issues of command. The previous arguments the British had used against a unified commander paled in comparison to the threats they now faced. Given the German attacks, they believed that a unified commander would allow more French forces to aid them in stopping the German attack. On March 26th, the sixth day of the battle, representatives from the French and British governments and armies met at Doullens in Northern France to discuss a new command arrangement to handle the ongoing emergency.<sup>261</sup> Foch's appointment over the failed Interallied General Reserve in January placed him as the natural candidate to coordinate the Allied armies as they fought to contain the German offensive. At Doullens the Allies decided that:

General Foch is charged by the British and French Governments with the coordination of the military operations of the Allied armies on the western front. To this end, he will make arrangements with the Generals-in-Chief, who are requested to furnish him all necessary information.<sup>262</sup>

Although the Doullens Agreement, as it became known, was a move towards the appointment of a supreme commander, it fell short of this fact. As Foch noted in his

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>261</sup> Foch, 298.

<sup>262</sup> Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 254.

memoirs, “the simple role of *co-ordinator* was not sufficient” and the “role should be changed into one of *direction* [emphasis original].”<sup>263</sup> Writing on March 31st to Clemenceau, Foch made this point as well as recommended that his authority should be extended to the Italian front.<sup>264</sup> The American forces were conspicuously absent from the Doullens Agreement, and Lloyd George made efforts to extend it to cover American forces shortly after it was signed.<sup>265</sup> Despite Americans instance prior to March 1918 that a unified Allied commander was necessary, they had little to do with Foch’s appointment at Doullens.

The Allies met on April 3rd at Beauvais to address concerns with the Doullens Agreement. The new “Beauvais Agreement,” not only addressed Foch’s concerns between coordination and direction, but extended the command relationship to the American forces in France:

General Foch is charged by the British, French, and American Governments with the coordination of the action of the Allied armies on the western front. To this end all powers necessary to secure effective realization are conferred on him. The British, French, and American Governments for this purpose entrust to General Foch the strategic direction of military operations. The Commanders-in-Chief of the British, French, and American armies have full control of the tactical employment of their forces. Each Commander-in-Chief will have the right of appeal to his government if in his opinion the safety of his army is compromised by an order received from General Foch.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Foch, 313.

<sup>264</sup> Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 267.

<sup>265</sup> Lloyd George reached out to President Wilson to extend the Doullens’s Agreement to encompass the US forces in France on March 29, 1918. *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 277

Now present, the Americans supported the new agreement with little disagreement between the assembled parties. The only issue of contention, and it was minor, was Petain's argument that the agreement could not apply to the Americans, as they had yet no army for it to apply to. Bliss and Pershing overcame this minor hurdle and by the close of the day the Beauvais Agreement, for all intents and purposes, unified the Allied and American forces under Foch.<sup>267</sup> The Italians were incorporated into the agreement during the fifth session of the Supreme War Council that May, albeit with Foch's power limited a coordinating role.<sup>268</sup>

Thus, the Allies realized the highest level of military coordination they would achieve during the war. Although the Americans had pushed the Allies to integrate their forces, they made little progress. Only the surprising speed and success of the Michael Offensive finally broke the British barrier to an Allied commander-in-chief. The Americans were incorporated into the Allied command relationship, but were not the driving factor in creating it. Therefore, the American effects on the Allied decision to place Foch as commander-in-chief was minor.

#### The Amalgamation Decision

Just as the German offensive put pressure on the Allies to unify their command relationships, it magnified their manpower shortage in the face of staggering losses. As

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Fifth Session of the Supreme War Council, held at Abbeville, May 1-2, 1918, 33; Records of the American Section of the Supreme War Council, 1917-1919, National Archives Microfilm Publication M923, roll 21.

such, they pressed repeatedly for American reinforcements, making the March through July 1918 the final period of the amalgamation controversy. The Allies made repeated efforts to incorporate US forces into their armies, all the while encouraging increasingly larger shipments of American combat troops. Instead of whole divisions, the Allies wanted only American combat troops to replace their losses, threatening Pershing's goal of forming a balanced army in France.<sup>269</sup> Resistant to their requests, Pershing used Allied desperation and lack of unity to avoid amalgamation and quicken the arrival of US forces to France. Given his orders to form a, "separate and distinct component of the combined forces" he had saw little option but pursue this course.<sup>270</sup> The army he formed in August was beset with tremendous training, equipment, and organizational problems, but created much faster than the 1919 timetable originally envisioned. Although Pershing took advantage of Allied anxiety during the spring crisis to create an independent AEF faster than expected, its independent nature did not affect Allied strategic decision making.

Within days of the German March offensive the Allies were calling for American troops to make good French and British losses. Newton Baker (US Secretary of War) happened to be in London at the time and received a visit from Lloyd George. The prime minister wanted to modify the Six Division Plan (see chapter 4) so that the infantry of the six divisions slated for training with the British would be sent first. He also wanted US divisions to relieve French forces in quiet sectors, and engineer units sent to build

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<sup>269</sup> The writings of this time as well as this thesis reference whole divisions and balanced forces. These terms implied the division in question includes the necessary artillery, logistics, and headquarters elements. When the Allies referred to combat forces, they were referencing only to the infantry or machine gun units below division level.

<sup>270</sup> Harbord, 66.

defenses behind the British lines.<sup>271</sup> On the same day Pershing and Petain met and agreed that the divisions earmarked for the US I Corps would be sent to relieve French divisions in quiet sectors. Although this delayed the creation of the first American corps in France, it was acceptable to Pershing given the emergency the Allies faced.<sup>272</sup> The flurry of activity only continued, with the Italians asking for American troops the next day.<sup>273</sup> The emergency forced Bliss and Pershing to subordinate their original desires for an independent AEF to the needs of the Allies. Although Bliss continued to support the Allied need for manpower at the cost of an independent US field army, Pershing quickly went back to opposing amalgamation at every turn.

The permanent military representatives of the Supreme War Council met on March 27th to address the emergency. They passed Joint Note No. 18, calling for transporting two US divisions to France per month (approximately 48,000 men). It also called on the Americans to accept temporary amalgamation into British and French corps and divisions. Finally, it recommended sending only infantry and machine gun units to France.<sup>274</sup> Bliss supported Joint Note 18, but not Pershing. In fact, after Pershing left the meeting, Bliss publicly stated, “General Pershing expressed only his opinion, and that it is the military representatives who must make a decision.”<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 252.

<sup>272</sup> Pershing, 1:356-357.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:358-359.

<sup>274</sup> Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 257-258.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

Baker's presence in Europe allowed him to mediate a compromise between Bliss and Pershing that was approved by President Wilson on March 29th.<sup>276</sup> In summary, the agreement gave "preferential transportation of American infantry and machine-gun units" to be transported "under the direction of the Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces and will be assigned for training and use by him in his discretion."<sup>277</sup> Although the memorandum stated that this, "necessarily postpones the organization and training of complete American divisions as parts of an independent American army" it would be "continued only so long as that situation necessarily demands it" and implied that it was up to Pershing to decide how long the "situation" would last.<sup>278</sup> Baker found a way to placate Bliss by agreeing to ship combat troops to Europe during the emergency, but at the same time reassuring Pershing that the forces would remain under his direction. In effect, Baker weakened the language of Joint Note 18 by keeping the forces under Pershing's control, enabling the commander of the AEF to remove forces from the British and French as soon as their training was complete, thus negating some of the value they provided to the Allies. Baker's deference to Pershing's control of the situation is in line with previous decisions, as political leadership at the time supported their commander in Europe.<sup>279</sup> At this point the Americans had effectively reverted to their prior stance of avoiding amalgamation except in emergencies

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Pershing, 1:257.

or for training purposes. Although they nominally supported the Allied effort for American combat troops, Pershing's influence over shipping priorities and his control over training schedules negated a large part of their value.

Parties on both sides of the Atlantic confused the amalgamation issue by working simultaneously to solve it without coordinating with each other. While Pershing, Bliss, Baker, and the permanent military representatives of the SWC were working in Europe, Lord Rufus Reading, the British ambassador in Washington, was meeting with President Wilson. Lloyd George cabled Reading on April 2nd and directed him to meet with the president in order to request that the US ship 120,000 troops to France per month starting in April and continuing as long as the US could supply them.<sup>280</sup> Reading, apparently taking Wilson's conciliatory tone as approval, cabled Lloyd George that the Americans had agreed to the British plan. Baker and Pershing were shocked upon hearing the news from the British, and cabled Washington for clarification. Wilson had not changed his stance since his approval of Baker's plan from March 29th and only assured Reading that, "we would send troops over as fast as we could make them ready."<sup>281</sup> At a subsequent meeting with the president on April 10th, Reading found him "disinclined to answer specific points" without first consulting his military advisors, presumably Baker.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Historical Division, Department of the Army, *United States Army in the World War: 1917-1919, Training and Use of American Units with the British and French*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1948), 78.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>282</sup> Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 313.

The confusion over amalgamation only grew as individuals continued to make agreements without coordinating with their partners. Throughout the confusion, Pershing consistently maintained control of the American forces in question, thus giving him leverage over the Allies. At a meeting in Washington on April 21st, Reading, Baker, and Wilson agreed to send 120,000 infantry and machine-gun troops per month during April, May, June and July using a mixture of British and American shipping. Once in Europe, the soldiers would be assigned for training with the British and French under Pershing's control with their curriculum and the timing of their release dictated by him.<sup>283</sup> A few days later, Pershing was in London attempting to make arrangements with the British when he was presented with the Washington plan from April 21st. Proceeding on his own, Pershing made a new agreement with Lord Alfred Milner (British Secretary of State for War) on April 24th, called the "Pershing-Milner Agreement" or the "London Agreement." This agreement stipulated that both parties would ship six divisions of infantry and machine gun units in May for training with the British and French and that any remaining shipping would be used for the remainder of their divisions. They also agreed to the particulars of how long the troops would train with the British and on what equipment. The estimate of troops to be shipping in a combination of US and British ships totaled 118,000 in April, 200,000 in May, and 220,000 in June, for a grand total of 538,000 men. By July they envisioned transporting a total of 750,000 men to Europe.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 342-344.

Once word of the Pershing-Milner agreement reached Washington, Baker supported Pershing's position over the agreement he had previously brokered with Reading. Again, Pershing showed that he was able to hold his own not only against the Allies, but also his fellow Americans. His hand was strengthened by the Allied desire for manpower and the political backing of his superiors in Washington. The Allied reliance on US manpower forced them to resort to courses of action that they had previously avoided, namely the British using their shipping for US troops versus the British war economy (see chapter 4 for more discussion on this topic). The political backing Pershing maintained from both Baker and Wilson gave him a significant amount of leverage when making agreements, even to the point where those he brokered overrode those made in Washington. In accordance with his orders, Pershing was determined to build a balanced force to create an independent American field army. The Pershing-Milner Agreement opened Pershing's AEF to many risks, the largest being an imbalance of forces (i.e., more combat troops than his logistics could support) and unevenly trained divisions. These risks were somewhat mitigated by Pershing's control over the troops training regime and his continued command during their training. This enabled him to call them back from the British or French when their training was complete in order to form American divisions and subsequent corps and armies.

Other than the meeting of the permanent military representatives and the issuance of Joint Note 18 on March 27th, there was little discussion with the French concerning the transport of US troops or amalgamation. At a meeting on April 25th, ostensibly to discuss his offer of troops to the French, Pershing discussed the US and British arrangements with Foch. Despite Foch's insistence for American infantrymen, Pershing

consistently reminded him that the AEF needed complete divisions in order to form an American army. Both left the meeting “with mutual assurances of confidence and cooperation” without really agreeing to anything.<sup>285</sup>

Clemenceau, Foch, Milner, Haig, and General Henry Wilson (British Chief of the Imperial General Staff) met on two days later to discuss the plans that the British had made with the Americans. Clemenceau was particularly disappointed that the British made the agreement without French involvement. Ultimately the parties decided to take the issue up at the next Supreme War Council session on May 1st.<sup>286</sup>

The first issue addressed at the fifth session of the SWC was the employment and shipping of American troops to Europe.<sup>287</sup> Clemenceau objected to the Pershing-Milner Agreement for it seemed to leave the French without access to American reinforcements.<sup>288</sup> Foch and Lloyd George argued that without amalgamating US manpower, the war might be lost before Pershing was able to form his American army. Lloyd George in particular remarked,

If the United States does not come to our aid, then perhaps the enemy's calculations will be correct. If France and Great Britain should have to yield, their defeat would be honorable, for they would have fought to their last man, while the United States would have to stop without having put into line more men than little Belgium.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 348-350.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 355-356.

<sup>287</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Fifth Session of the Supreme War Council, held at Abbeville, May 1-2, 1918, 3.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>289</sup> The quote above is from Pershing's memoirs, see Pershing, 2:31. To validate the statement, the minutes of the May SWC sessions were reviewed and it is noted there

The British prime minister continued to propose a plan roughly in line with the Pershing-Milner agreement, albeit with the possibility for additional shipping and continuing the plan into August.<sup>290</sup> In his reply, Pershing stated:

I am entirely in agreement . . . as to the gravity of the present situation. In fact, we are all agreed on that point.

Speaking in the name of the American Army and in the name of the American people, I wish to express their earnest desire to take their full part in this battle, and to share the burden of the war to the fullest extent . . .

America declared war independently of the Allies and she must face it as soon as possible with a powerful army . . .

The American soldier has his own pride, and the time will soon come when our troops, as well as our Government, will demand an autonomous army under the American High Command.

I understand that in Mr. Lloyd George's proposal we shall have to examine the situation again in June before deciding for July.

That is all I can agree to at present, and I think by this arrangement we are meeting the situation fairly and squarely.<sup>291</sup>

This exchange illustrates how the Allies were frustrated in their attempts to receive American reinforcements for their armies at the expense of an independent AEF. Lloyd George's reference to the US employing less forces than Belgium was certainly meant to hit at the lack of American involvement up to this point and spur Pershing to give in to his demands. Pershing could easily refuse the Allied requests given the support he received from Washington. Just the week prior he overrode one made by the US

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as well, see Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Fifth Session of the Supreme War Council, held at Abbeville, May 1-2, 1918, 36.

<sup>290</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Fifth Session of the Supreme War Council, held at Abbeville, May 1-2, 1918, 36-37.

<sup>291</sup> The quote above is from Pershing's memoirs, see Pershing, 2:33.

President and Secretary of War, giving Pershing the confidence to stand his ground against the combined British and French pressure.

Ultimately the council passed Resolution No. 6, “Regarding the cooperation of the American Army” which called for the formation of an American army, “as early as possible.”<sup>292</sup> American infantry and machine gun units would be sent to France as rapidly as they could for training and service with the British and French, to be withdrawn at Pershing’s discretion. The British would bring over 130,000 men in May and 150,000 men in June, with the first six divisions going to the British but the remainder “allocated for training and service” by Pershing.

Any British shipping in excess of the 150,000 men in June would be used to bring over only infantry and machine gun units, but “such infantry and machine-gun units are to be withdrawn and united with their own artillery and auxiliary troops into divisions and corps at the decreasing of the American Commander-in-Chief.”<sup>293</sup> The council agreed to re-address the situation in early June, presumably at the next session of the Supreme War Council.<sup>294</sup>

Despite the controversy surrounding the amalgamation issue, there appeared to be little change in Allied strategy. The fact that Pershing was successful in keeping reinforcements flowing to Europe but outside of Allied control did not change the Allied plans. At this point the British and French remained focused on maintaining their

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<sup>292</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Fifth Session of the Supreme War Council, held at Abbeville, May 1-2, 1918, Resolution No.6.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

positions in France and absorbing the German blows. The torrent of meetings between Foch, Pershing, Petain, Haig, as well as the political leaders from American, Britain, and France during March and April produced little to no change in the Allied strategy.

When the Allies met during the first three days in June at Versailles for the sixth session of the SWC, the topic of American forces came up again. This time the council approved the Pershing-Milner-Foch agreement, wherein 250,000 Americans would be transported per month in June and July. Of those, 170,000 and 140,000 combat troops would be brought over in June and July, respectively. The rest (250,000) were units designated by Pershing.<sup>295</sup> It is clear from the shipping priorities from the middle of June that Pershing took full advantage of his leverage over the Allies, using the bulk of the 250,000 men under his discretion to ship troops for the Service of Supply (SOS), artillery, and unit headquarters.<sup>296</sup> As the amalgamation debate wound down in the face of increased American forces, it is clear that the Allies were having less influence over their US partners. After the SWC approved Resolution 6 during the May session, it was harder for the Allies to overcome Pershing's desires. In June, the Allies effectively supported the creation of an AEF despite their desire to the contrary. Even though they still preferred to receive raw US recruits, increasingly the Americans shipped over the forces necessary to create independent units.

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<sup>295</sup> Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 444.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 456-457. The memorandum, "Troop Shipments Under Versailles Agreement" from Pershing to the War Department on June 8, 1918, outlines the specific types of troops to be shipped under the Pershing-Milner-Foch agreement which were primarily SOS, artillery, replacements, and headquarters.

By the end of June and early July 1918 the amalgamation issue was settled, the result being the formation of the 1st US Army in August. The Americans had achieved more than the Allies, with both achieving some of their aims at the expense of others. From the American perspective, the amalgamation controversy produced prodigious numbers of US doughboys in Europe and allowed the creation of an AEF but at the cost of its effectiveness. The Allied desire for infantrymen at all costs meant that the US forces lacked the necessary logistics support. General James Harbord, first served as Pershing's Chief of Staff and later as Chief of the SOS, noted in his memoirs that,

It is certain that if the Armistice had not come when it did, there would have had to be a suspension of hostilities and movement until the supply and troop program could be brought back into balance. A very great proportion of the transport fleet would have to bring personnel and supply material for the impoverished S.O.S., and the further shipment of combatant troops would have to had to wait.<sup>297</sup>

Besides the lack of support from the SOS, the US forces entered combat with an uneven mix of units and training. In a cablegram to Washington on June 20th, Pershing noted, "Our inspections of divisions recently arrived show that the training is uneven and varies much in different divisions" and that the continued program of training men piecemeal due to the shipping schedule would "considerably reduce the fighting strength of several divisions."<sup>298</sup> Although Pershing was able to create a large AEF faster than originally expected, it was at the cost of combat effectiveness. The Americans were also chronically reliant on the Allies for aircraft, tanks, and artillery support.<sup>299</sup> Although the

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<sup>297</sup> Harbord, 401.

<sup>298</sup> Pershing, 2:114

<sup>299</sup> Stevenson, 129.

Allies and Germans alike praised the fighting spirit of the doughboys, their organization and leadership was in many ways inferior to those they fought alongside and against, due to the decisions made during the search for a solution to the amalgamation controversy.

For the Allies, the amalgamation controversy brought American manpower to Europe but not in the way they desired. America did not prove to be a source of reinforcements to fill the ranks of their armies, but did provide the forces necessary for victory. The benefit of US manpower, even in a training role, bolstered the beleaguered French and British armies. Both utilized US manpower during the German spring offensives to help blunt the drives, either through using US divisions directly under foreign command (such as the US 1st Division at the Cantigny or the 2nd Division at Belleau Wood) or as relief in quiet sectors and freeing up British and French troops for service elsewhere. In some circumstances, US forces were effectively amalgamated permanently within French or British forces, such as the four infantry regiments of the 93rd Division that served with the French and the 27th and 30th Divisions which served with the British.<sup>300</sup> In another way, the arrival of the Americans and the deep reserves of manpower in the US gave the Allies the confidence to bring the last of their forces to bear against the Germans, confident that the Americans would be able to reinforce them if necessary. Lloyd George states this clearly in his memoirs:

But the importance of the American contribution was far from being bounded by the actual number of troops that participated in the battle. Not only did the presence of over a score of [Foch's] American divisions give to the Allied Armies the numerical superiority needed to overpower the Germans; the fact that behind these there were another score of divisions in process of formation and training and yet other millions of men in America who could be brought over as need arose, enabled the French and British to fling their last reserves into the fight

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<sup>300</sup> Pershing, 2:97, 2:219, 2:231.

without hesitation or misgiving, and hammer ceaselessly at the German lines until they crumbled and broke.<sup>301</sup>

This leads to the conclusion that the US was able to influence the Allies throughout the course of the amalgamation debate to implement a key piece of US policy, i.e., the creation of an independent AEF. However, the US success does not represent a great impact on Allied strategic decision making. The specific employment of US forces, either in an AEF or amalgamated into British and French armies, did not change the overall strategic direction the Allies sought. The Allies consistently pressed for additional American forces in Europe to enable them to withstand the German offensives and then go on an offensive of their own. This was their strategy for 1918 and 1919 and this is what happened. Although Pershing maintained course and even accelerated the creation of the AEF throughout this time period, this did not correspond to any changes in Allied strategic decision making.

#### Dispersion of Combat Forces

The large number of doughboys on their way to Europe due to the compromises of the amalgamation controversy allowed Allied planners to seek diversion of US units to theaters other than the western front. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed in March 1918 and took the Russians formally out of the war, allowing the Germans to send forces from the eastern front for the offensives in France. This spurred the Allies to look for ways to re-open the eastern front. One method was to send expeditions to the east to organize local forces to fight the Germans, and the Allies called upon the Americans to

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<sup>301</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs 1917-1918*, 447.

aid them in this end. This plan made sense given that Allied strategy had always included sideshow theaters, such as the British effort in Mesopotamia and the joint French and British expedition at Salonika. US policy rejected this strategy, instead focusing squarely on fighting German forces on the western front. To fully examine the US influence on Allied strategic decision making, it is necessary to analyze the American impact on the Allied strategy on theaters other than France. During the early months of 1918 the US successfully rebuffed Allied pressure to send an expedition to Russia to stabilize the situation there due to the Bolshevik Revolution. This section analyzes the Allied efforts to divert US forces to Russia and Italy after March 1918 and ultimately concludes that although the US was successful in maintaining its position in the matter, this had little effect on Allied strategic decision making.

By the summer of 1918, the US chose to cooperate with Allied requests and sent small forces to Russia and Italy. In the case of Russia, sending American units to Vladivostok, Archangel and Murmansk was the best way to limit Allied and Japanese intervention there. In the Italian case, the small number of US forces dispatched was enough to quiet discontent from the Italians and did not impact the buildup of the AEF in France. Neither was meant to expand US involvement outside of France and were structured to limit further Allied involvement (particularly in Russia) and settle the issues. This did not represent a change of US policy and demonstrated that the US was able to maintain its wartime policy in the face of Allied pressure to do otherwise.

The Allied strategy for intervention in Russia centered around re-establishing a front against the Central Powers in the east. The Allied strategy incorporated their manpower limitations, seeking to support existing military forces in the east versus

sending large British or French expeditions. Prior to the German-Bolshevik peace treaty on March 3rd, the Allies looked towards the armies of the Russian Provisional Government and later the Bolsheviks to keep German forces in the east. After Brest-Litovsk, the Allies looked to organize resistance from anti-Bolshevik and anti-German forces. The US resisted these efforts, reasoning that the chaos in Russia alone precluded success, but also fearing Allied intervention would push the Russians towards the Germans and increase Japanese influence in the Far East (see chapter 4 for an analysis of Allied attempts to encourage American intervention in Russia prior to March 1918).

Although the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the Michael offensive increased the urgency to reestablish the eastern front, they did not immediately produce a change in the rationale for Allied intervention. Using familiar logic, in April the Allied members of the military representatives to the SWC proposed Joint Note No. 20, “The Situation in the Eastern Theatre,” which called for immediately sending forces to reconstitute the eastern front.<sup>302</sup> They argued this would tie up German forces there and stop subsequent exploitation of Russian resources. Bliss tactfully killed the proposal, being unable to approve it because, “the instructions which I had received from my Government were to the effect that the whole question of intervention in Siberia was the subject of diplomatic negotiation; that I, therefore, could not join them in signing the note.”<sup>303</sup> Without Bliss’ approval Joint Note 20 could not make it to the next session of the SWC, and it was effectively nullified.

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<sup>302</sup> Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 113-114.

<sup>303</sup> See General Bliss’ Final Report in, United States Department of State, *The Lansing Papers*, 452.

In May and June, the Allies changed their tactics to entice the Americans in their schemes. At the May session of the SWC they argued in support of the “Czech Legion,” a group of Czechs that had fought in the Russian army against the Central Powers and who were battling the Bolsheviks along the Trans-Siberian Railway on their way towards Vladivostok.<sup>304</sup> At the June SWC they provided additional justification for a Russian expedition, this time looking for forces to safeguard the Allied stocks of materiel which had accumulated at Murmansk and Archangel.<sup>305</sup> In both instances the US supported the SWC resolutions, in contrast to their rejection of earlier proposals. By this time, it was clear that the Allies intended to intervene in Russia with or without US approval. The Japanese and British had landed forces in Vladivostok on April 5th, ostensibly to protect their citizenry that were at risk given the chaos in Russia.<sup>306</sup> Additionally, in June both the British and French had small numbers of forces in and around the Russian Arctic ports in question.<sup>307</sup> Up to this point the US was successful in not being drawn into the

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<sup>304</sup> See Joint Note 25, “Transportation of Czech Troops from Siberia” in Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Fifth Session of the Supreme War Council, held at Abbeville, May 1-2, 1918, 32-33.

<sup>305</sup> See Joint Note 31, “Allied Intervention at Russian Arctic Ports” in Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Sixth Session of the Supreme War Council, held in the Council Chamber, Trianon Palace, Versailles June 1-3, 1918, 72, Annexure A, 29-32, Records of the American Section of the Supreme War Council, 1917-1919, National Archives Microfilm Publication M923, roll 21.

<sup>306</sup> Betty M. Unterberger, *America’s Siberian Expedition, 1918-1920 A Study of National Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1956), 39.

<sup>307</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Sixth Session of the Supreme War Council, held in the Council Chamber, Trianon Palace, Versailles June 1-3, 1918, 17.

Allied efforts to intervene in Russia, but was unable to stop the Allies from doing so themselves.

Despite US intentions of keeping the Allies and Japan out of Russia, it appeared that outright denial of their requests was not working. The Allies pressed the Americans hard at the July session of the SWC, asking for American support both in the Arctic ports and in Siberia. Bliss tentatively agreed that three American battalions would be sent to Murmansk and Archangel and the Allies sent a plea to President Wilson to support their plan for intervention in Russia.<sup>308</sup> On July 17th President Wilson reframed the US position towards Russia, clarifying the US policy with a memorandum that was sent to the British, French and Italians titled, “Aide-Mémoire.”<sup>309</sup> In it he argued against military intervention as a prudent method to win the war, stating that, “military intervention there would add to the present confusion in Russia rather than cure it, injure her rather than help her, and that it would be of no advantage in the prosecution of our main design to win the war against Germany.”<sup>310</sup> However, he did agree to send forces to Vladivostok, Murmansk, and Archangel but to only aid the Czech Legion in leaving Russia and to secure the Allied stores at the ports.<sup>311</sup> Beyond this, the US would provide no material aid

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<sup>308</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Seventh Session of the Supreme War Council, held at Versailles, July 2-4, 1918, 19-20, 46-53; Records of the American Section of the Supreme War Council, 1917-1919, National Archives Microfilm Publication M923, roll 21.

<sup>309</sup> Department of State, *Foreign Relations, Russia, Vol II*, 287-290. The memorandum is also published in Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 540-542.

<sup>310</sup> Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 541.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

for Allied actions in Russia and would not support the Allied strategy to reconstitute an eastern front. Wilson's *aide mémoire* is significant as it clearly outlined the US policy towards theaters outside of France and the limits of US involvement there.

Based on the President's decision it appears the US changed course on its policy towards Russia. This was not the case. The same reasons that the US avoided intervention in Russia during the winter of 1917 and 1918 held firm throughout 1918. By July it was clear that the Allies were going to intervene in Russia with or without US consent, as was Japan. Those nations had already sent forces into Russia and were planning to send more. Thus, sending US troops to accompany the Allied and Japanese forces was a way for the US to control the situation and discourage further intervention.<sup>312</sup> Indeed, further requests for troops from both Britain and France in August failed to elicit additional American support.<sup>313</sup> However, it did not matter that the US refused to send more troops to Russia. The Allied strategy looked to use indigenous forces to supplement their own and did not rely on large numbers of Allied troops. In western Siberia, for example, the French organized a force of some 73,000 men, only 1,000 of whom were French, the rest being either Czech or Polish.<sup>314</sup> Therefore it is evident that the US was successful in keeping their involvement in Russia limited, but this did not affect the Allied strategy.

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<sup>312</sup> This point is made by Trask in his work, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 128 and by Unterberger in, *America's Siberian Expedition*, 232.

<sup>313</sup> Unterberger, 91-94.

<sup>314</sup> Nik Cornish, *The Russian Revolution: World War to Civil War 1917-1921* (South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Books, 2012), 62.

Unlike the situation in Russia, sending of US forces to Italy was not nearly as controversial. Although it was not an American priority, they agreed with the Allies that sending a small force of American soldiers to the Italian front would boost Italian morale and cost little for the overall effort. Prior to the summer of 1918 US forces had not been sent to Italy because they were needed elsewhere more urgently.<sup>315</sup> After consulting with the Italian prime minister, Vittorio Orlando, Pershing decided to send the 332nd Infantry Regiment to Italy in June 1918.<sup>316</sup> When President Wilson sent his *aide mémoire* in July, he referenced the situation in Italy noting, “the Italian front as closely coordinated with the western front, however, and [the US is] willing to divert a portion of [US] military forces from France to Italy if it is the judgment and wishes of the Supreme Command that it should do so.”<sup>317</sup> Effectively the Americans saw the Italian front as an extension of the fight in France, and therefore sending forces there was not in conflict with US policy. It was not a military priority for anyone except the Italians, which explains the token American force sent.

The circumstances of US forces outside of the French theater of operations demonstrates how the US was able to maintain their policy in the face of Allied pressure to do otherwise. However, this was of little consequence for Allied strategy. The Allies wanted to intervene in Russia as a way to reconstitute the eastern front, and relied on

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<sup>315</sup> For example, Pétain argued that US forces not be sent to Italy in December 1917 because they were more urgently needed in France – see Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 100.

<sup>316</sup> Pershing, 2:36-37.

<sup>317</sup> Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 541.

local forces to fight for the Allied cause. In the Far East Japan provided the majority of the forces and was preparing to intervene before Wilson issued his *aide mémoire*. Wilson desired to limit Allied and Japanese involvement, and took actions necessary to curb their intervention in Russian affairs. Whatever success the US might have had in keeping the Allied forces in Russia small, the Americans had little effect on the Allied strategy. The Allies found other partners to provide much of the manpower for the expeditions, later incorporating Romanian, Serb, Latvian, Finnish, and Greeks into the existing British, French, Italian, Americans, Japanese and Czech forces.<sup>318</sup> Therefore, major American intervention would have assisted the Allies, but was not required. The US reluctance to commit forces and limit further British and French intervention did not affect the Allied strategy towards Russia. In the case of the Italian front, Wilson saw this as an extension of the western front, and allowed as necessary the shipment of US forces there. In both the Italian and Russian instances, the number of US forces committed was small (only about 17,000), and were a way of ensuring US policy towards the war in France.<sup>319</sup> The US was ultimately successful in staying focused on the war on the western front, however this did not affect the overall Allied strategic decision making toward the war.

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<sup>318</sup> Gilbert, 62-63.

<sup>319</sup> Unterberger, 96 references 9,000 men sent to Siberia (i.e., Vladivostok). Historical Division, Department of the Army, *United States Army in the World War: 1917-1919, Reports of the Commander-in-Chief, Staff Sections and Services* Vol. 12 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1948), 86 references 4,000 men sent to Archangel and Murmansk for a total of 13,000 US servicemen in Russia. The 332 Inf. Reg in Italy was approximately 4,000 men. Therefore, the total number of US servicemen in Russia and Italy was approximately 17,000.

### The 80 Division Plan

The influence of the US upon the Allied strategy for matters such as unity of command, amalgamation, and the dispersal of forces was small in comparison to the effect of US manpower. As previously discussed, the Allies saw the arrival of US forces in Europe as the deciding strategic factor in the war. Although they obviously preferred the Americans to be amalgamated into their forces, the fact that US servicemen arrived was ultimately more important to the Allies than under whom they served.<sup>320</sup> The additional shipping utilized during the spring and early summer of 1918 allowed the buildup of American forces far faster than thought previously. By June 30, 1918 the AEF consisted of 40,487 officers and 833,204 enlisted men.<sup>321</sup> Counting whole divisions and those only partially shipped to France, in June there were 24 US divisions in Europe with more on their way.<sup>322</sup>

Looking ahead to 1919, Foch and Pershing created a plan in the middle of June that called for 80 US divisions in France by April 1919 with a total of 100 present by July of that year.<sup>323</sup> Foch's logic for those amounts was based on the estimated German strength for the coming year and in order to, "place the Entente in a position to make with certainty a decisive effort in 1919, it must have an undoubted numerical superiority over

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<sup>320</sup> Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking*, 175.

<sup>321</sup> Pershing, 2:129.

<sup>322</sup> Ayres, 33. See Diagram 13, "Time from organization of divisions to entering line". Note, a US division at this time was nominally 28,000 men and officers; *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>323</sup> Foch, 396-397.

the 220 or 240 German divisions.”<sup>324</sup> The fighting of the First World War ended short of 1919, but this was not foreseen during the summer of 1918. The SWC approved of the 100 Division plan, as it became called, during its seventh session in July.<sup>325</sup>

The War Department ultimately approved a smaller 80 Division Plan in July, noting that it was impractical to carry out the larger plan in the face of logistical concerns.<sup>326</sup> Despite appearances otherwise, there were limits to the US manpower available. The additional men supplied to France during the spring gave the armies there the numbers necessary for success, but stretched US reserves across the Atlantic. Given the urgency for manpower, Pershing was forced to request a new draft of 1,500,000 men in April to meet the Allied demands.<sup>327</sup> Shipping trained men throughout the spring also caused a lack of personnel for instruction within the US. During discussion over the Pershing-Milner-Foch agreement at the June SWC Pershing noted that the US could not send all the infantry the Allies requested, because it was taking too many instructors away from the training centers. If he carried out the plan as originally requested, he would have only had 50,000 men available in July for instructing the new drafts.<sup>328</sup> This helps explain why the War Department limited the scheme for 1919 to only 80 divisions. Even when limited, the fact that the Allies were still envisioning large numbers of US

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<sup>324</sup> Foch, 396.

<sup>325</sup> Proces-Verbal of the Three Meetings of the Seventh Session of the Supreme War Council, held at Versailles, July 2-4, 1918, L.C. 72 Resolution No. 2.

<sup>326</sup> Pershing, 2: 235.

<sup>327</sup> Historical Division, *Policy-Forming Documents*, 344.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 438.

forces arriving in Europe through the middle of 1919 demonstrated they were reliant on American manpower. The combination of the difficulties the British and French faced in maintaining the size of their forces on the western front during 1918 and the shipment of German forces from the eastern front forced the Allies to rely on American manpower. Just as they had in 1917, the Allies had not lost sight of the primacy of American manpower, and formulated their strategy around this fact.

Although US manpower was the overarching strategic factor of Allied strategy, it is difficult to determine which had more effect on the Allies' ability to withstand the German onslaught during the spring of 1918. The strategic failures and degradation of the German armies, the creation of an Allied commander-in-chief, and the increased presence of American forces all contributed to the resilience of the Allied armies during the months between March and June. The American impact was minor during the first German offensives, but by the last of them was playing a major role. During the Michael offensive, few US forces were engaged in combat and their most significant role was taking over quiet sectors of the front from more seasoned Allied divisions.<sup>329</sup> The same held true during the Georgette offensive in April.<sup>330</sup> During Operation Blucher-Yorch, launched in late May, the Americans played a more active yet still not decisive role. The US 1st Division was engaged at Cantigny, the 2nd Division at Belleau Wood, and the 3rd Division at Chateau-Thierry.<sup>331</sup> As with the earlier offensives, the most significant role

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<sup>329</sup> The only units engaged included companies from the 6th Engineers, in service with the British during the time of the German attack. See Pershing, 1:355.

<sup>330</sup> Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warming*, 59.

<sup>331</sup> Pershing, 2:90.

for the Americans in May was to free up Allied (primarily French) divisions in quiet sectors, allowing them to focus on stopping the Germans. Between March 21st and May 10th, US forces went from holding 22 to 55 kilometers of the western front.<sup>332</sup> The pattern repeated itself again during Operation Gneisenau (9-12 June) with the US 1st Division defending at Cantigny while the Americans held significant portions of quiet sectors elsewhere.<sup>333</sup> By the time of Ludendorff's, Friedenssturm (Peace) offensive on July 15th, the presence of the Americans proved more decisive. By this time, the Americans were holding 100 kilometers of the western front.<sup>334</sup> It was also during July that elements of the 3rd Division earned the nickname the, "Rock of the Marne" for their efforts to help stop the German offensive. Additionally, the 26th, 28th, 42nd, and elements of the 93rd Divisions were engaged. By the middle of the summer of 1918 the American forces were playing a greater role in defeating the German attacks, certainly having a larger effect than on the first offensives of March, April, and May.

If American manpower played a decisive role in shaping Allied strategy during 1918, it was to allow it to transition from the defense to the offense. As the Germans attacked throughout the spring, the Americans were flowing into France faster than the Germans could cause Allied casualties. Between the Michael offensive in March and the Battle of the Second Marne (the Friedenssturm offensive) in June the Allies took 753,076

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<sup>332</sup> Ayres, 103. See Diagram 44, "Kilometers of front line held by armies of each nation."

<sup>333</sup> Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking*, 74.

<sup>334</sup> Ayres, 103. See Diagram 44, "Kilometers of front line held by armies of each nation."

casualties compared to only 616,170 German casualties, a difference of 136,906 in the German's favor (see table 1). At the same time 728,160 doughboys were shipped to France, largely counteracting the Allied losses, while the German losses could not be replaced (see table 1). Therefore, even though the men shipped from America were not adequately trained, were reliant on European equipment, and poorly led by inexperienced officers, their sheer numbers proved decisive.

The effect of the American doughboys was to maintain the combat power of the Allies throughout the German offensives while those forces lost the best of their strength. Where the US forces in France were not engaged with the enemy but instead were guarding quiet sectors of the line, they freed up the more experienced French and British units for action elsewhere. At the end of March US forces were covering approximately four percent of the western front, the British 19 percent and the French 72 percent.<sup>335</sup> By July the British and French percentages had dropped to 17 and 67 percent, respectively, while the US frontage increased three-fold to 12 percent.<sup>336</sup> This had the effect of concentrating the trained British and French divisions against the enemy, allowing them to stop the German attacks with some direct American assistance.

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 63. See Diagram 63, "Per cent of front line held by each army during 1918."

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

Table 1. Combat Casualties and US Troops Shipped, March-September 1918								
	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Total
US Troops Shipped	84,889	118,642	245,945	278,684	306,350	285,974	257,457	1,577,941
German Losses	239,800	86,000	105,370	25,000	160,000	75,000	17,000	708,170
Allied Losses	254,739	112,000	127,337	40,000	219,000	44,000	7,000	804,076

*Source:* Created by author from data in Stevenson, 68, 77, 87, 91, 111, 116, 123, 129.

In July, it was clear to Foch that the tide had turned in the Allies' favor. He wrote in his memoirs, "By the middle of July it could be seen that the time [of numerical superiority of the Allies] was fast approaching. If the enemy did not attack, the hour had come for us to take the offensive; if he did attack, to accompany our parry with a powerful counter-stroke."<sup>337</sup> The counter-stroke Foch spoke of was the French attack at Soissons, which included the American III Corps (1st and 2nd Divisions).<sup>338</sup> After the Friedenssturm offensive was stopped after just a few days of fighting, Foch unleashed the counterattack, beginning the string offensives which ultimately lead to the armistice in November 1918. On July 24th Foch met with Petain, Haig, and Pershing and outlined his plans for the year, informing them that the time had come to push the German's back.<sup>339</sup> Given the numbers of the Allies and their recent victory, "The moment has come to abandon the general defensive attitude forced upon us until now by the numerical

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<sup>337</sup> Foch, 407.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 414-415.

<sup>339</sup> Foch outlined his thoughts in a memorandum on July 24th, which is reprinted in his memoirs, see Foch, 425-429. For his discussion with the commanders-in-chief, see Ibid., 429-432.

inferiority and to pass to the offensive.”<sup>340</sup> Although each commanders-in-chief had issues with Foch’s plan, they accepted it in principle.<sup>341</sup> Even though Foch saw that it was time for the Allies to hit back during 1918, he still envisioned the war lasting in 1919, calling on Clemenceau to call up the conscription class of 1920 and asking Haig, Petain, and Pershing what resources they would have at the beginning of 1919.<sup>342</sup> Foch’s plan for the rest of 1918 included a series of surprise attacks on the German line, each following quickly after the other. He wanted to clear the railway lines around Paris, Amiens, and the Saint-Mihiel Salient as well as drive the enemy from Dunkirk and Calais as part of an “important offensive moment, such as will increase our advantages and leave no respite to the enemy.”<sup>343</sup> Foch was able to contemplate his offensive because of the American reinforcements. Thus, the Americans enabled Foch to transition his strategic defensive to a strategic offensive.

The offensive that Foch envisioned started with a British-lead attack at Amiens on August 8th, in what Ludendorff called the, “black day of the German Army.”<sup>344</sup> When the French attacked near Soissons on August 20th, Ludendorff called it, “another black day” as the German setbacks continued.<sup>345</sup> The British attacked again in what became the

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 427.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 430.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 431.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 428-429.

<sup>344</sup> Ludendorff, 2:679.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 2:694.

Second Battle of the Somme on August 21st, forcing the Germans back and widening the front of Allied attacks to 150 kilometers.<sup>346</sup> In August the Germans had taken some 228,000 casualties but received only 130,000 replacements.<sup>347</sup> In order to consolidate their lines the Germans evacuated the Lys salient (created during Operation Georgette) starting on September 3rd.<sup>348</sup> Although most of the fighting during this time was done by the British and French, it was enabled by the presence of American forces. The Americans shipped 285,974 men in August, while the Allies received some 44,000 casualties (see table 1). Throughout the hard fighting of August, the number of forces aligned against the Germans increased by over 241,000 men, whereas the German strength decreased by some 98,000 men. It is clear that the American entry into the First World War had a decisive effect on Allied strategy during this time.

As the British and French attacked the Germans in August, the Americans were forming the US 1st Army on August 10th.<sup>349</sup> The Americans quickly set about planning to eliminate the Saint Mihiel salient, a task envisioned for them since the July 24th meeting of the commanders-in-chief.<sup>350</sup> Even as planning for this major operation was ongoing, Foch changed his strategy for employment of the AEF. After the AEF eliminated the German salient, he wanted to transfer many of its divisions to Petain for

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<sup>346</sup> Stevenson, 126-127.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>348</sup> Ludendorff, 2:697.

<sup>349</sup> Pershing, 2:211.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 2:175.

further operations with the French. This was unacceptable to Pershing, who saw this as a ploy to destroy the AEF even before it went into combat. Ultimately the Americans and French came to a compromise that scaled back the Saint Mihiel operation but committed Pershing to extending his forces opposite the Meuse-Argonne sector, some 90 miles of line north of Saint Mihiel.<sup>351</sup> The AEF was now tasked to eliminate the Saint Mihiel salient and then shift forces within 10 days to the north and begin an offensive through the Meuse-Argonne. The Americans formed the southern end of the Allied “important offensive” that Foch spoke of on July 24th, as the Allied armies closed in in a concentric circle on the German forces in Belgium.

The American attack along the Meuse-Argonne began on September 26th in concert with a French attack west of the Argonne. This was quickly followed by an Allied attack (including forces from Belgium, Britain, and France) in Flanders on the 28th.<sup>352</sup> The Allied armies from here on were fighting a defeated foe. On September 28, General Erich Ludendorff approached General Paul von Hindenburg, Chief of the General Staff, and demanded an immediate armistice.<sup>353</sup> The newly appointed German chancellor, Prince Maximilian von Baden, sent a note to President Wilson asking for one just days later.<sup>354</sup> The German position was untenable, not just on the western front but

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<sup>351</sup> The discussion between Pershing, Foch and Pétain is described in Pershing, 2:243-255.

<sup>352</sup> Stevenson, 132-135.

<sup>353</sup> Ludendorff, 2:271.

<sup>354</sup> James Brown Scott, *Official statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, December 1916 to November 1918* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 413, 415.

across Europe. The Allied forces at Salonika broke the Bulgarian lines at roughly the same time as the Allies and Americans began their general offensive in France. The Allied victory in the Balkans demoralized the Bulgarian army and forced that nation to sue for an armistice by the end of the month.<sup>355</sup> The collapse of Bulgaria opened Austria's southern flank as well as Constantinople to future Allied offensives. Throughout the month of October, the Americans and Germans negotiated basic terms for an armistice, which were then negotiated amongst the Allies during the eighth meeting of the Supreme War Council between October 31st and November 4th. On November 11, 1918 the armistice with Germany went into effect, and the fighting of the First World War stopped.

The final phase of the Allied strategy was reliant on US manpower. Once the Allies weathered the German onslaught during the spring of 1918, it was the American doughboy, produced in prodigious numbers and sent to France during the critical months of April through June, that allowed the Allies to transition to the strategic offensive. The plan that Foch presented on July 24th for the remainder of 1918 was heavily dependent on US manpower. It allowed the British and the French to concentrate their forces while the Americans took over up to 21 percent of the western front by November 1918.<sup>356</sup> Additionally, the final three months of conflict saw 849,781 Americans shipped to France along with 270,000 Allied casualties, for an end-strength *increase* of nearly 580,000 men despite some of the toughest fighting of the war (see table 1). Even though the men

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<sup>355</sup> Willmott, 271.

<sup>356</sup> Ayres, 63. See Diagram 63, "Per cent of front line held by each army during 1918."

shipped from America were unevenly trained, reliant on European equipment, and poorly led, their sheer numbers proved decisive.

The purpose of this thesis is not to evaluate the fighting abilities of American forces during the First World War, but to understand how the American presence in the war effected the Allies' strategy. It is clear from the above that the American serviceman was perhaps the greatest impact the US had on the Allies strategy. From the moment the US entered the war, the Allies saw the manpower reserves in America as vital to their war effort. Although there was significant disagreement about how Americans would serve, whether amalgamated into Allied forces or independently under their own leadership, the determining factor for Allied strategy was always the arrival of these forces.

### Chapter Conclusions

During the months of conflict in 1918 the US exercised increased influence and used it to maintain key US political and military strategic goals. Allies and US found common ground during the search for a unified command, which was ultimately implemented due to the German spring offensives. General Pershing's steadfast position to refuse to allow permanent amalgamation enabling the creation of American corps and armies far faster than previously expected. With the arrival of large numbers of US forces, the Americans allowed the minor dispersion of forces to theaters beyond France. The US forces sent to Russia there to minimize Allied involvement in the Far East and arctic more than support their aspirations in those regions, whereas the forces in Italy were of token size and sent more for morale purposes than for any genuine military

effort. Neither of these efforts greatly impacted Allied strategic decision making, although they did allow the US to maintain its wartime policy.

The largest effect of the US upon Allied strategy from March through November 1918 was the presence of large numbers of US forces. Sending an army to Europe was a cornerstone of US policy, and it played a pivotal role during the creation of Allied strategy at the end of 1917 and early into 1918. Once major hostilities renewed in 1918, the primacy of American manpower again shown through, dictating the actions of both the Allies and Central Powers. During the German spring offensives US manpower enabled the Allies to relocate their more experienced divisions to stop the attacks, and the arriving US servicemen largely offset Allied losses. Once the Germans were stopped, the presence of the AEF and assurances of additional American reinforcements allowed Foch to plan a general offensive. At Foch's meeting with the commanders-in-chief on July 24th, both Petain and Haig were reluctant to commit their exhausted armies. Only Pershing pressed to fight, asking only that his forces be allowed to fight as an independent army.<sup>357</sup> Thus it must be concluded the greatest effect the US had on Allied strategic decision making was providing the edge for the Allies to survive the German onslaught and then transition to an offensive that ultimately ended the fighting by November 1918.

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<sup>357</sup> Foch, 430. Haig: "The British Army, entirely disorganized by the events of March and April, is still far from being re-established." Pétain: "The French Army, after four years of war and the severest of trials, is at present worn out, bled white, anemic." Pershing: "The American Army asks nothing better than to fight, but it has not yet been formed."

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

I doubt whether any of the heads of the governments with whom we have been dealing quite recognize how far they are now committed to the American peace program.<sup>358</sup>

—Edward House

Edward House optimistically wrote those words to President Wilson at the conclusion of the pre-armistice talks with the Allies. In hindsight, House's comments may appear delusionary, but represent an optimism that the American presence had proved so decisive and necessary to the Allied war effort that it provided a strong hand for Wilson to dictate his peace. The American entry was certainly a factor in the Allied victory, but was not all-encompassing and did not fundamentally change their strategic decision making. The US entrance into the First World War gave the Allies the manpower necessary to continue along the path they began in August 1914, but otherwise did not affect the way the coordinated, created, or executed strategy.

The Allies achieved the strategic unity of action in 1918 that enabled victory over the forces of Germany and the other Central Powers. The issues of crafting and coordinating a unified strategy were solved largely through the creation of the Supreme War Council. Incorporating all the remaining Allied great powers, as well as their American associate, the SWC provided a regular forum for them to discuss issues of strategic importance and to find common ground. Through the SWC, the Allies and Americans balanced their individual strategies and policies, ultimately agreeing to

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<sup>358</sup> Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 171.

courses of action that met the basic needs of both sides. Finally, the German offensive in March 1918 removed the final roadblocks to a unified commander, which by April 3rd was vested in Marshall Foch. The Americans consistently pursued their own strategy and policy, at times in concert with the Allies but at other times at distinct odds. This thesis concludes that the overall US influence on Allied strategic decision making after April 1917 was minimal. The greatest effect of the Americans during this time was the arrival of US reinforcements which allowed the Allies to continue to create and execute their existing strategy. The changes the Allies made in 1918 to improve their strategic decision making were instruments of their own choosing as well as adaptations made necessary by German actions on the battlefield.

The final body for the coordination and creation of Allied strategy, the Supreme War Council, was an outgrowth of the continual improvements in British and French cooperation that began with their first meetings at Chantilly in 1915. The SWC represented an evolution of Allied strategic decision making due to the Austro-German victory over the Italians at Caporetto, not American pressure to increase Allied cooperation. Created by Lloyd George as a political body, the Americans attempted to modify the SWC into a tool to unify military action. Their actions failed in the face of British stubbornness, and the body remained a political instrument for the creation and execution of Allied strategy. The American response to this left General Bliss as the sole American appointed to the council, continuing the US policy of political separation from the Allies. Ultimately this proved inconsequential as the Allies continued along their own path. This leads to the conclusion that the US did not seriously affect the coordination of Allied strategy.

The entrance of the US into the First World War did not change the balance of power within the Allies. Just as had happened prior to April 1917, the Allies continued to find common ground to prioritize their strategy across their various needs and desires. Allied reliance on American manpower did not make the US the dominant partner over them during the second half of 1918. Throughout the amalgamation controversy Pershing took advantage of Allied shipping to bring over his forces faster than expected, but gave concessions to the Allies in the form of temporary amalgamation and in some cases allowed American units to serve under British and French command for the duration of the war. The amalgamation issue is a prime example of the strength of American bargaining power, but ultimately proves that the American presence did not affect the Allied strategy. It was more important to Allied strategy that the Americans arrive, and less important who they fought with.

The Allied position towards a unified command on the western front changed drastically between the time of the US entrance into the war and the armistice. However, this change was not due to the American presence. Although the US representatives in France were in favor of a unified command, their efforts failed to bring it about. Bliss heavily supported Foch's aborted Interallied General Reserve at the Supreme War Council, even after it was defeated, but to no avail. Once the Germans began their offensives in 1918, it was their success that spurred the British to relent to a French commander-in-chief of the Allied armies. Therefore, although the Americans heavily supported a unified command, they were not the cause of its creation.

The arrival of large numbers of doughboys was the largest US effect on Allied strategy, however this did not change Allied strategic decision making. The plans created

at the early sessions of the Supreme War Council envisioned a strategic defense in 1918 while the Allies awaited the arrival of American forces. If able, Foch wanted to counterattack the expected German offensive in 1918, but the decisive effort was planned for 1919 once the AEF had arrived in force. Once the Allies survived the German spring offensives, American manpower enabled them to transition from the defense to the offense, just as Foch had argued at the third session of the SWC.<sup>359</sup> It was American manpower that gave Foch this ability; by taking over quiet sectors of the front the AEF enabled the Allies to concentrate their division for the decisive blow. The AEF also became an offensive force in its own right, acting as the right wing of the “important offensive” Foch launched against the Germans in September 1918.<sup>360</sup> As important as this was, it did not affect the Allied strategic decision making. Foch was firmly in control of Allied military strategy, and the 100 Days Offensive was in large measure a testament to his success in coordinating the Allied and American efforts.

Upon taking position as British Secretary of State for War in 1914, Lord Kitchener is said to have remarked, “The Germans may reach Paris, but it will not be like 1870 this time. It will be a long struggle if we want to go to the end. If the Germans take Paris the French armies will retire behind the Loire, and we shall retire with them. But in two years from now we, Great Britain, will throw our last million men into the scale, and we shall win!”<sup>361</sup> The idea of the “last million men” has become a metaphor for the

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<sup>359</sup> Foch, 275.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 428-429.

<sup>361</sup> Henry D. Davray, *Lord Kitchener: His Work and His Prestige* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1917), 24-25.

stalemate and attrition on the western front. In effect, the US entrance into the Great War provided the last million men to the Allies.<sup>362</sup> Providing the means to continue the war effort, the arrival of the AEF in late 1918 did not necessitate a change to Allied strategy. Although the Americans undoubtedly played a decisive role in the end of the First World War, they did not affect Allied strategic decision making during their time in Europe.

This conclusion has ramification for today's American military. 2017 marks the centennial of the American declaration of war on Germany. As the first foray into the realm of coalition war making for the United States, American involvement in the Great War provides many parallels to the wars of the day. The Allies had been fighting and dying for over three years before the first US division took its place in line on the western front. Despite the decisive advantage that US manpower provided, it did not change the strategic path the Allies had already established. Indeed, in many of the ongoing conflicts around the world, the players have been fighting for years, if not decades. US policy makers and military leaders should not assume that an American presence in those conflicts immediately creates an environment conducive for an American strategy. In 1917, the United States was not the superpower of the Cold War era, and could not plan to carry a coalition on its shoulders as the US military has since 1945. Still, during the First World War Americans recognized the important role they had to play, and expected a certain level of influence over Allied strategy and decision making. The minimal level of influence they did exert over the Allies demonstrates that providing the keys to victory late in the war did not erase the loss, struggle, and experiences the Allies built up over

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<sup>362</sup> 2,086,000 American servicemen served in France. Of them, 1,390,000 fought against the Germans. See Ayres, 11.

three years of heavy fighting. Today, US military leaders should be cautious in assuming that American military might gives them the ability to dictate a strategy to nations that have been fighting for years. Few of the wars and conflicts ongoing appear to be new. As such, the US military should not assume that entering an existing conflict means that they will bring a new strategy to the table. If anything, they should seek to understand the existing strategy and determine how US military might best applies to the situation at hand.

Another parallel between the American experience during the First World War and today is the increasingly multi-polar world environment. The First World War was born from a world with multiple great powers, of which the US was merely one among many. In many ways, the US involvement in the First World War was the first and last time the US was a part of a coalition in which it was not the leading partner. By understanding how the US interacted with Britain, France, and Italy in 1917 and 1918, we can learn lessons that prove valuable to a future coalition. For example, although the US provided the coalition the necessary manpower for victory, this did not give the US the strongest seat at the table. Just as important were British shipping and French leadership. Each partner brought something to the coalition that gave them leverage over the others. As such, the partners were forced to work together to achieve their goal of defeating the Central Powers. The same could be said for a future coalition where the US does not play the leading role. Although the US will likely provide a key piece of the military puzzle, we should not assume that this gives us the ability to determine the course of the conflict. Recognizing balance is in many ways as important as recognizing strength in a coalition. It was through their ability to balance their needs and desires that

the Allies and Americans ultimately created the solutions that won the war. As such, US military leaders should not be afraid of compromise within a coalition.

The final conclusion from this thesis is to focus on the task at hand. A common American criticism during the First World War was that the Allies were fighting for different reasons and kept trying to winning the peace before they defeated the enemy. Pershing put it best in his memoirs when he said, “The lack of unity in military operations conducted jointly by allied armies often results from divergence of war aims. In pursuit of these aims, governments may seek to place part of their forces in a position that would be advantageous after the war is over and lose sight of the fact that complete victory can only be achieved by beating the enemy’s army.”<sup>363</sup> They constantly focused on the campaigns and operations that provided either territory or leverage over not just the Central Powers but the other members of their coalition. As such, they made poor decisions that Germany and her partners used against them. Defeats such as the disparate French and British attacks during 1915, the disagreement over the Salonika campaign, and the strategies of 1916 and 1917 illustrate an alliance that could balance their needs, but at the expense of unity of action. Lloyd George, ever critical of the British generals, wrote, “We had to remove the fundamental cause of the failures of 1915, 1916, and 1917. What was it? The blind and stupid refusal to accept the principle of the single front.”<sup>364</sup> The single front he references is the idea that each nation continually focused on their section of the war, without regard for what their partners needed. This left the Allied

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<sup>363</sup> Pershing, 1:34.

<sup>364</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, 4:2340.

armies fragmented and weak, unable to support each other or bring their maximum effort against the enemy. The Allies eventually achieved a single front because the Germans largely eliminated the other fronts, and once they began their final offensives in France they forced the Allies to unify their national commands under Foch. The supreme effort that Americans had pointed out as lacking was achieved due to enemy action, and ultimately provided the victory they had sought all along. If the First World War teaches us anything about the importance of strategy within a coalition, it is that it should be a unified strategy, incorporating the strengths of all the members in such a way to bring the most pressure upon the enemy. Splintering a coalition's effort along individual desires only causes needless death, destruction, and delay.

## GLOSSARY

**Allies.** Initially began as with the nations of the Triple Entente. Serbia and Japan joined in 1914 as the war began in August 1914. Italy joined the Allies in May 1915 with the signing of the Treaty of London. Romania joined the war on the side of the Allies in August 1916. Numerous other nations joined the fight with the Allies, but are not relevant to this thesis.

**Central Powers.** The wartime coalition of Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire (secret member: August 1914, public member: October 1914), and Bulgaria (October 1915).

**Cruiser Rules.** See Prize Regulations

**Prize Regulations.** Rules that governed submarine warfare prior to the implementation of Unrestricted Submarine Warfare. Required a submarine to surface and search merchantmen prior to sinking them. The crew were required to be cared for unless the ship resisted.

**Triple Alliance.** An alliance between the nations of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy that began in 1882.

**Triple Entente (or Entente).** The nations of Britain, France, and Russia formed a block in response to the Triple Alliance. It began with the Entente Cordiale of 1904 between France and Russia and expanded to Britain with the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. It was not a formal treaty for military aid but an informal agreement to aid the others in the event of a larger continental war.

**Unrestricted Submarine Warfare.** The act of using submarines to sink merchantmen, whether from neutral or belligerent nations, without prior warning.

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